

‘From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.’

Today we conclude our reflections on the Holy See’s Declaration *Dignitas Infinita [DI]*, looking at its teaching on gender theory. This was the section most highlighted by the media – unsurprising given the recent explosion in influence of transgenderism: the claim of there being many genders, not just male and female; and the claimed right of all people, regardless of biological characteristics, to identify as the gender of their choice and be treated accordingly.

Dignitas Infinita first reiterates the dignity of every person. It states: ‘The Church wishes, first of all, “to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while every sign of unjust discrimination is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence.”’ (*DI* 55, quoting Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) 250)

This dignity comes from the Creator. ‘Human life in all its dimensions, both physical and spiritual’, the document declares, ‘is a gift from God. This gift is to be accepted with gratitude and placed at the service of the good.’ (*DI* 57) But it warns: ‘Desiring a personal self-determination, as gender theory prescribes, apart from this fundamental truth that human life is a gift, amounts to a concession to the age-old temptation to make oneself God, entering into competition with the true God of love revealed to us in the Gospel.’ (*ibid.*)

Reflecting on this desire for unrestricted self-determination, we observe how contemporary culture emphasises being ‘authentic’, one’s ‘true self’: ‘No one besides me can tell me who I really am.’ Now, it is quite legitimate not to conform to the *false* expectations of others, in order to be my true self. But that leads to the deeper question, ‘What really is my true self?’

I cannot ‘create my own identity’ in the deepest sense: I can only *search* for my identity because I already *have* a basic existence and identity, by which I am constituted as a being and as a person in the first place. And both faith and reason tell us that these come from God. There is a great image from St Augustine quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: God is ‘higher than my highest and more inward than my innermost self.’ (n. 300) So we can think of God as creating us ‘from within’ – not like an external force ‘intruding’ on our true selves.

In our God-given identities, first of all, obviously we are *human*. People sometimes speak as if we are each so unique as to have nothing in common – and so, no one could dare to comment on someone else’s ‘true self’. True, we each have our unique characteristics. But if human nature is basic to everyone’s identity, of course we all have the right to express what human nature is.

Next, human beings necessarily have both bodies and souls; no human being comes into existence without a body. In 2019, the Holy See’s Congregation for Catholic Education published a document on gender theory, *Male and Female He Created Them*, which affirmed: ‘Human nature must be understood on the basis of the *unity of body and soul*’ (32); ‘In fact, there are rational arguments to support the *centrality of the body* as an integrating element of personal identity and family relationships.’ (24) So all this means that my identity is not just some mysterious thing hidden in my consciousness – my own thoughts and feelings that no one else can know or speak about. The human body is an observable fact.

And central to human existence is the power to bring *other* human beings into existence. We are in God's image, and this is the supreme way that we mirror the *creativity* of God. So our procreative potentialities are not marginal to our humanity, and this relates to our biological nature as male or female, complementary to each other. The sex God gave to each one of us cannot be 'wrong': it belongs to the centre of the identity in which he constituted us in existence.

Dignitas Infinita declares, 'It is through their bodies that men and women can establish a loving relationship capable of generating other persons.' (60) 'In the male-female couple, [sexual] difference achieves the most marvellous of reciprocities. It thus becomes the source of that miracle that never ceases to surprise us: the arrival of new human beings in the world.' (58) (This also relates to marriage only being between a man and a woman. By nature, only a male and female can have children together. So *physiological* orientation to the opposite sex is built into everyone's biology, everyone's identity.)

People talk about various 'identities' based on inner emotions – heterosexual, homosexual, transgender and so on. But understood as our deepest essence, they are a fiction. Our *identity* is none of these things, nor any mere emotion, which is always changeable. For all of us, our surface desires and emotions can sometimes be out of harmony with our true selves, often enough through no fault of our own. Repeating, what we all are – equally, basically and inalienably – is *human*. And human nature always includes the body, and its basic given orientation towards either motherhood or fatherhood, making us woman or man (whether or not we ever actually become parents).

Dignitas Infinita draws the necessary conclusions. It declares: '...all attempts to obscure reference to the ineliminable sexual difference between man and woman are to be rejected: "We cannot separate the masculine and the feminine from God's work of creation, which is prior to all our decisions and experiences, and where biological elements exist which are impossible to ignore." (*Amoris Laetitia* 286) Only by acknowledging and accepting this difference in reciprocity can each person fully discover themselves, their dignity, and their identity.' (59)

'Constituting the person's being, the soul and the body both participate in the dignity that characterises every human... Teaching about the need to respect the natural order of the human person, Pope Francis affirmed that "creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created." (*Amoris Laetitia* 56) It follows that any sex-change intervention, as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception.' (*DI* 60)

'This is not to exclude the possibility that a person with genital abnormalities that are already evident at birth or that develop later may choose to receive the assistance of healthcare professionals to resolve these abnormalities. However, in this case, such a medical procedure would not constitute a sex change in the sense intended here.' (*ibid.*) (So, the Church distinguishes the cases where there is pre-existing physical ambiguity.)

Taking everything back to our deepest call, which is to love: genuine love affirms each person in his or her true identity, first of all our shared human nature. To claim otherwise for anyone would deny their full and equal humanity. In the end, we listen to the words of Jesus himself: 'From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.' (*Mk* 10:6) And so we follow the way of true love, and accompany each other on the path to the joyful freedom of the sons and daughters of God.