

The greatest challenge to the Church's teaching on the truth about human nature today is the so-called gender theory promoted by the "LGBT movement".

The name of this movement indicates people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Its professed aim is to fight against discrimination and social exclusion of such people. The movement is a loose alliance of various associations, organisations, and individuals, and it is therefore difficult to speak of a social agenda representative of all of its participants. Those who identify with it have varying interpretations of what this discrimination is and how to overcome it.

According to the theorists of the movement, the underlying discrimination lies in the so-called oppressive heterosexual normativity of traditional societies, i.e., the belief that only a union between a man and a woman deserves to be called marriage and granted rights and privileges. According to some of the movement leaders, heterosexual normativity is a major source of suffering for people who experience their sexuality differently. They therefore seek to redefine marriage and the family so that same-sex unions can enjoy the same rights and privileges as traditional monogamous marriages. They list the possibility of adopting children, the availability of the in vitro procedure, and surrogacy. According to many members of the movement, its actual goal should be a radical cultural and legal revolution, resulting in a society "with no gender differences".

What discrimination?

The Catholic Church indicates that persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (CCC 2358). However, the very acronym LGBT evokes an erroneous anthropology and as a consequence should not be used in the debate in the Church.

People experiencing difficulties with their gender identity are often scarred by painful experiences. The Church's teaching and sacraments are a source of grace that heals the wounds and offers reconciliation with oneself, loved ones and God. Importantly, this healing and transformation, which aims to create "a new self (...) in righteousness and holiness of truth" (cf. Eph 4:24) is predicated on seeing oneself and one's wounds in light of God's truth. Inner healing is not effected through sociological or psychological theories, but through the discovery and inner acceptance of the truth about man created in the "image and likeness" of God as male and female. The consequence of accepting the truth is to live in accordance with the truth, which we traditionally call conversion. Therefore, in its search for acceptance and social legitimacy, the Church cannot afford to forget that she is "the pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Tim 3:15). Therefore, in proclaiming mercy, the Church must constantly remind us that homosexual acts, by their very nature, are intrinsically disordered and contrary to natural law. Thus, "Under no circumstances can they be approved" (CCC 2357). It is a matter of concern with the human being.

Gender as a call

Drawing on God's revelation, in the course of two millennia of reflection on the Divine word, the Catholic Church has produced a rich compendium of knowledge about the human body, gender difference, sexuality, and fertility. Rooted in creation, the truth about man and woman is based on the conviction of the equal dignity of the two sexes, despite the real difference between them. The biological and psychological difference between the sexes makes the greatest miracle in human history possible: the love that leads to the conception of new life. The love between man and woman, rooted in sexual difference and sexual desire, gives rise to the family, the most fundamental form of social organisation. The family is the primary nurturing and educational environment in which each person learns what is most important for being human: care and respect for others, solidarity, sharing, and dialogue. This is not to discredit or diminish other forms of mutual care, but to remind us that nothing can replace a loving, monogamous, and fertile marriage as the cornerstone of a healthy society. Any state that cares about its future should give special, preferential care to stable marriages and families.

After the original sin, human history became a space for forgetting the proper nature of man created in God's image and the proper meaning of sexual difference. This oblivion has taken different forms in different times, but it has always led to a breakdown of the unity between man and woman and to doubting love. According to the sad prophecy of Genesis (cf. Gn 3:16), gender difference, especially for women, became a source of discrimination and exploitation. In Western history, the misogynistic belief, rooted in ancient philosophy, that only the male is a full human being and that the female lacks some essential part of rational human nature, has persisted for centuries.

Unity of body and soul

As St. John Paul II reminded us, today the way we understand the body and gender is particularly distorted by anthropological dualism. The Pope's *Letter to Families* reads: "The separation of spirit and body in man has led to a growing tendency to consider the human body, not in accordance with the categories of its specific likeness to God, but rather on the basis of its similarity to all the other bodies present in the world of nature, bodies which man uses as raw material in his efforts to produce goods for consumption". This triggers "a difficulty identifying with one's own body" and a sense of "a denigration through the body" – wrote St. John Paul II in *Man and Woman He Created Them*. The depreciation of the material and corporeal is a threat to human sexuality. A "new Manichaeism" results in a perception of sexuality as a space of "manipulation and exploitation" rather than a place through which the richness of the personal life of man and woman shines through. When one is "ashamed of one's body", one attempts to find one's personal and sexual identity outside the body or, contrary to what our body says, within one's biological and psychological structure.

The Second Vatican Council emphasised that "by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man" (GS 22), also with those who cannot identify with what his or her body says about their gender in its biological and mental structure. Each and every person, with their wounds, doubts, and difficulties must enter the mystery of Christ the Saviour and "must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then

bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself” – we read in *Redemptor hominis*.

If one of the consequences of the original sin is the shattering of the inner unity of man: “the difficulty of identifying with one's own body” or “being ashamed of one's body”, then one of the first fruits of God's grace is a person self-reconciliation. This includes reconciling with one's body, which in its masculinity or femininity is a work of God and partakes in the dignity of God's image (*imago Dei*) in the mystery of creation. Self-reconciliation, a fruit of faith and grace, is a precondition for reconciliation with others and for a joint construction of a more equitable Church and world.

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