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COMMUNITY

The Catechism of the Catholic Church – 15th November 2023

Commentary on the CCC no 10.

Nowadays there is a lot of talk about gender identity. New terms are used such as Gender Dysphoria, Gender-Fluid, & Non-binary. They suggest that the sense of being male, or female is a social construct which is not necessarily consistent with one's biology. In par. 56 of his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of Love* Pope Francis wrote, "a challenge is posed by the various forms of an ideology of gender that 'deny the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programs and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female.'" In a conversation with Polish bishops in 2016, Pope Francis said: "Today children — children — are taught in school that everyone can choose his or her sex. Why are they teaching this? Because the books are provided by the people and institutions that give you money. These forms of ideological colonization are also supported by influential countries. And this is terrible!"

I suspect that the part of the CCC we are exploring has been influenced by the writings of St John Paul II. He maintained that although we say that people are made in the image and likeness of God because of such things as freedom, reason and the spiritual nature of their immortal souls, "Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion." In other words when people lovingly give themselves without reserve in relationships such as marriage, friendship, service of the poor and so on, the human communion they experience is not only a reflection of the communion of Father, Son and Spirit in the Trinity, it is also a participation in it.

The CCC goes on to refer to pars, 22 & 24 of The Dogmatic Constitution on *The Church*, which John Paul regarded at the theological linchpins of Vatican II. It is only by entering the mystery of Christ that a person can get in touch with his or her true spiritual self. The fulfillment of our lives is found in total self-giving rather than selfish self-assertion. Pope John Paul reflected in a profound way on the theological implications of these points for all human relationships, especially Christian marriage in his book, *Theology of the Body*.

In a very significant section of that book, John Paul II said, "The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible, namely the spiritual and

the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it." In another place he said, "The human body includes right from the beginning...the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift – and by means of this gift – fulfils the meaning of his being and existence." Surely the Pope's appreciation of the body's ability to mediate the presence of God in Christ, represents a significant development in Catholic thinking about the on, potential of human sexuality.

I think that it is clear that following the teaching of the Bible, the Church believes in the natural law which makes it clear that we are either male or female, and that marriage is between a man and a woman. The sexual act is only appropriate within marriage and should not be inhibited in an artificial way. Like St Paul VI, John Paul believed that artificial forms of contraception were wrong precisely because they separate the unitive meaning of the sexual act from its procreative meaning. In that sense love making, while using a contraceptive, is no longer a sincere gift of one's *entire* self. The *CCC* says that when a baby is conceived, "The spiritual soul does not come from one's parents but is created immediately by God and is immortal." When the body dies, the soul continues to exist, and will be reunited with our glorified bodies at the resurrection of the dead.

It is worth noting in the context of his reflection on self-giving in marriage, that John Paul also spoke about the meaning of Christian celibacy. "When he (the celibate person) chooses continence for the kingdom of heaven, man has the awareness that in this way he can realize himself 'differently,' and in some sense 'more' than in marriage, by becoming 'a sincere gift to others'" i.e., through self-forgetful service of everyone in the community.