

‘Male & Female He Created Them’

The response to the latest document from the Vatican on the subject ‘male & female he created them’ will be resonating in the halls of academics and theologians: those caught in this crossfire of debate over who we are as human beings. The ‘official’ starting point may have been the Vatican, yet it is within marriage and family life that the consequences of such documents and discussions are lived out on a daily basis. Marriage & family are the frontier for evangelizing and the kernel for society. It is in marriage and in the family that we learn our first experiences of love, relationship, forgiveness and our place in the world. Bringing people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church and through the doors of marriage and family is what we, and this document, are about.

It remains a privilege for the MFL Office to have received an invitation to a recent conference held at St Mary Moorfields in London on ‘the beauty of the human person’. This conference was an immediate response to the Vatican document mentioned above, and was sponsored and advertised by the Association of Catholic Women as ‘the gender agenda’. We must confess that, without their permission, we have taken the liberty to rename it as ‘the beauty of the human person’ because the entire day unfolded with tangibles of the beauty of human persons. From the ongoing adoration, a welcoming site for visitors, to the two presentations, Holy Mass and a delicious lunch, the beauty of humanity was palpable on all fronts.

Kerri Christopher (Humanum Institute Director) kicked off with an excellent, informative, and inspirational presentation on the beauty of the human person created by God. The six key points I gleaned from her presentation are as follows:

- 1) Man and woman are biological realities ‘which are good and willed by God’ (CCC 369). It is therefore a rebellion against natural and Divine Law if a man or woman should attempt to alter their gender. or CCC2297 to suggest the state/civil authority has the duty or the right to act in favor of the legitimacy of such actions
- 2) Tax payers - you and I - are now paying for transgender surgery on the NHS and we have ‘models’ in Vogue magazine like Paris Lee as role models for our children. We have Bruce Jenner saying ‘call me Caitlyn’, whilst Meghan Markle asks ‘should we be assigning gender to babies at birth’? Meanwhile Tavistock Clinic, where transgender surgeries began, have had a number of staff resign because in time they came to realize that the suicide rates of their patients were not decreasing in spite of their initial objective to ‘heal’ these patients.
- 3) The Catholic Church has a positive holistic vision of the human person which states that (to summarise):

There is a reality outside of me and I can actually know it. This reality is given by God and I can actually receive it. Whether I am experiencing this reality or not it exists (eg. whether I can physically see a sunset or not, sunsets do exist and are independent of me). This is in sharp contrast with the idea that I construct reality. No matter how hard I believe something does not change the nature of this thing – eg. no matter how much I believe that my cat greets me by wagging its tail and jumping up and down, the reality is that dogs

behave in this manner not cats. The nature of things have limits. The conclusion from this argument is that we do not create things but DISCOVER them. My gift as a human being is to receive created nature which has limits. Another of my gifts is to discern their purpose.

- 4) As a human person I have the ability to reason because I am made of body, soul & spirit and I also have FREE WILL to make moral choices. Our sexuality involves the whole process (anatomy, physiology, psychological, affective, and spiritual) – it is not simply a question of which bits we have or don't have. The goal is to live an integrated life spiritually and physically: some aspects of my sexuality become more relevant than others at different times but I cannot separate them for I am one human being 'fearfully and wonderfully made' by God and in His image (Psalm 139).
- 5) There are False Limits/Outer Limits - limits to our ability even though we may have the capacity. For example, a human female has the capacity to have children but for a variety of sensitive reasons not all females are able to conceive and bear children. The capacity itself remains a gift, a task, and a responsibility. 7) Technology makes us believe we can change things. We cannot for eg change our ethnicity. There are limits to what we can alter.
- 6) The complexity of the gift of our sexuality is a call to receive the personhood of our being and discover the purpose of our lives. Whether it is my take on the matter, your take, his or her experience, we will each come to surrender our opinions to the TRUTH of who we are, where we come from and where we are destined for.

Holy Mass followed this soul-searching presentation and the home cooked lunch was savoured with much to ponder and discuss with other attendees, followed by further input by the erudite Louise Kirby (author of *Sexuality Explained* & Chairman of *Alive to the World*) who did a marvelous job of unravelling the history of sex education since 1972. The crux of the matter was that Sex Ed was not provided because parents requested it but rather because governments since 1972 have presented dubious figures and facts to suggest that parents felt inadequate and/or unwilling to educate their own children on matters of sexuality. Louise offered many alternative resources to explore such as *Alive to the World* programme and 'A global sexual revolution' by Gabrielle Kubi.

Louise's message was one that inspired us all to stand on the knowledge that we have as Catholics about the beauty of natural fertility. To educate our children about the gift of their natural fertility is to equip them to understand and preserve their purity. In this age where pornography is rife and our children are bombarded with the temptation of casual sex, it's high time we used creative opportunities to be catechized. Louise's book '*Sexuality Explained*' - for parents, children, and schools - is a must read for any parent who is searching for a practical approach to explaining the gift of our sexuality with respect and dignity.

A Way Forward

The sacramental programmes are prime opportunities to share such treasures with parents. A parish in Southsea have trialled a unique approach to this, in which the First Holy Communion parents were recently treated to a presentation on the Theology of the Body and The Holy Eucharist.

In our Diocese we are indebted to the Natural Family Planning Teaching Association Chairman, Dr Olive Duddy, and the Treasurer, Mrs Christine Bergess, for training 9 people in our diocese, on the Sympto-thermal Method. Please contact the Marriage and Family Life Office if you would like to contact any of our teachers for support with learning and practicing NFP. Congratulations to all our new NFP teachers!!!

The MFL team have also been approached by TEENstar, an organization that trains interested parents, catechists, and educators in teaching chastity to young children through the gift of understanding their natural fertility. Louise Kirby is a great advocate of Teenstar.

We would like to thank several of our Parish Priests who have supported us in our NFP learning especially those who have allowed us to host training events in their Parish - Canon Gerard Flynn (St Michael & All Angels-Leigh Park) & Fr James Bradley (Holy Family-Southampton). Our training events would have been impossible without the support of generous volunteers and the kindness of our Parish Administrators at these parishes – Ellen McCarthy & Amanda Wood.

For more information on the conference, contact the Association of Catholic Women at acwconference@gmail.com