

Towards
Dignity and Truth:
Compassionate Dialogue
and Pastoral Response
on Transgenderism
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Preface

The origins of this paper date back at least four years to when I read Christopher West's book, *Good News About Sex & Marriage: Answers to Your Honest Questions About Catholic Teaching*. After reading it, I did not immediately write anything. A few months later, the Holy Spirit prompting me to write a blog article entitled, "Chastity and Sexuality"¹ in March 2021.

Then, in April of 2021 I wrote an extended article, "Towards Dignity and Truth: Compassionate Dialogue on Homosexuality"² offering our Catholic faith's understanding of homosexuality.

In the last year I devoted several months to reading on the topic of Catholic understanding of gender. I wrote this paper during the month of August in 2023 with editing completed in September. The first weekend in September was the Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A. In my homily³ I spoke on Peter's rebuke of Jesus and how people are rebuking Jesus today by denying there is a truth (Jesus is *the way and the truth and the life*) and by teaching morality (or the lack thereof) that is contrary to what Jesus taught. In the first reading Jeremiah wrote of how he was made an "*object of laughter*" and mocked. Speaking the "*word of the Lord*" brought him "*derision and reproach*." I wonder if I will receive the same treatment for this paper. Yet, it does not matter. Through random conversations with parishioners, the Lord has shown me it was time to write this paper.

I ask that you read this paper with an open mind and an open heart. There is a lot to digest. In Ezekiel 3:1-4, we read the story of the prophet Ezekiel eating the scroll given to him by God. The scroll contained the word of God. It tasted as "*sweet as honey*." It was God's Word. God's Word is a gift to us. Yet, it is not always easy to accept.⁴ It can be difficult to digest.

What I write is not God's own word but I pray it is what He wants. It is not easy to digest. If you are new to this topic and/or it is very personal for you, I encourage you *to not* read it in one sitting. I think it may be most helpful if you read a section and then allow time to reflect on it before reading on. At times, you might even choose to read less than a whole section.

After reading it, if you find yourself interested in knowing more, the books listed in the bibliography are a source of much good information but they too must be read slowly. At times I know I found it difficult to absorb it all.

Most of all rely on the Holy Spirit to help you understand the struggle some people face over their gender. In any words you offer them, make sure your love and God's love is the first thing shared.

Fr. Jeff

¹ You can read my blog article, "Chastity and Sexuality" at <http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=6022>.

² Tunncliff, Rev. Jeffrey S., "Towards Dignity and Truth: Compassionate Dialogue on Homosexuality." April 12, 2021. Available online at <http://nebula.wsimg.com/fd32eb99faa2f3fe5e6f8b9c0446eb78?AccessKeyId=F465FCE598BCE1CD661B&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

³ Tunncliff, Rev. Jeffrey S., "22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A – Homily", September 3, 2023. <http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=9604> .

⁴ Cf. Revelation 10:9.

Acknowledgements

This paper is not the work of one person. The bibliography for the many sources I read shows the work I did but the research was assisted by a parishioner who is a retired medical doctor. He also read the drafts and offered comments. Three of my friends generously offered their time for proofreading and for wording and structure. They choose not to be named here as they assisted me not for their own glory but for the glory of God. I thank all of them.

Most of all, I would like to thank the Holy Spirit. I hope this paper is what God wants. I do not want to express my opinion. I pray that God has used my writing skills to share his Truth with love and compassion.

All cited Bible Verses are taken from *St. Joseph Edition of The New American Bible Revised Edition*. New Jersey, Catholic Book Publishing Corp. 2010.

Introduction

Two and a half years ago I wrote an article entitled “Towards Dignity and Truth: Compassionate Dialogue on Homosexuality.”⁵ I began that article speaking about the difficulty of discussing homosexuality because it can evoke very strong feelings and can be very personal when one knows someone who is homosexual. The topic of homosexuality also raises questions of “tolerance” of others’ beliefs.⁶ This present document addresses transgenderism, a topic that can be even more difficult to discuss because of the subjective nature of the question of what it means to be transgendered. (More on “subjective nature” later in this document.)

There are many new words used in the modern gender ideology vocabulary. The growing number of words and the fact that the words are used in different ways complicates pulling together ideas from different sources. There are two terms that are presently generally accepted that I will define here.

The first term is “gender dysphoria.” Evert describes gender dysphoria

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), it is defined as “A marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, of at least six month’s duration.”⁷

The second term is “transgender”, which Evert defines as

A term first used in 1965, it refers to individuals whose sense of gender identity does not align with their sex.⁸

(Sex here is their biological gender that they were born with.)

In order to understand what our Catholic faith says concerning gender, this paper will cover some essential areas such as our Catholic sacramental view of the world, incarnational theology, truth, and what it means to be compassionate and merciful. It is because we care about the person that we want them to know the truth. The truth is not always easy to hear or follow.

As Christians we believe that there is truth. However, we live in an increasingly polarized world where more and more people believe that there is no universal truth and we become polarized around our own “opinions”.⁹ Here, an important question is how do we have genuine dialogue

⁵ Tunnicliff, Rev. Jeffrey S., “Towards Dignity and Truth: Compassionate Dialogue on Homosexuality.” April 12, 2021. Available online at <http://nebula.wsimg.com/fd32eb99faa2f3fe5e6f8b9c0446eb78?AccessKeyId=F465FCE598BCE1CD661B&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

⁶ See my article “Tolerance, Hate Speech, and Dialogue.” January 12, 2021. <http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=5641>

⁷ Evert, Jason, *Male, Female, Other/ A Catholic Guide to Understanding Gender*. Scottsdale, AZ: Totus Tuus Press. 2022. 19.

⁸ Evert, 27.

⁹ For an excellent discussion of how we minister in a polarized world, see Rev. Aaron Wessman, *The Church’s Mission in a Polarized World*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press. 2023.

when we do not even agree on the notion of truth. It may seem difficult. Do not lose hope! Remember, *nothing is impossible for God!*

It is ***not*** our task to judge or condemn anyone. Here we turn to Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery, "*Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more.*"¹⁰ Our task is not to condemn. Our task is to help others know and follow the truth.

Each person is free to make decisions for themselves. However, "Freedom is not liberty to indulge our compulsions. It's liberation from the compulsion to indulge."¹¹ Ezekiel 3:17-21 tells us that we are called to help people see when danger approaches (i.e. they are making decisions contrary to God's will) but once we do that is for them to decide.

This paper is not meant to be a scientific study of the medical issues involved in transgenderism. However, it will refer to some of them so that we can understand the ***whole*** picture. Neither is this article meant to be an academic and/or theological study of gender issues. I write with the hopes of helping people understand the many different facets involved in understanding transgenderism in a way that promotes understanding of our Catholic perspective and compassionate dialogue. I hope it helps build bridges between people who disagree over this issue.¹²

Gender *confusion* is real. It's also all around us. Thus, it is important that we have some understanding of it. By "gender confusion", I mean the struggle a person can face to understand who they are in relation to their body and their feelings of their gender as a male or female. This happens in part because we do not teach our children what it means to be male or female. However, it is more complex than this one cause.

The language of gender identity can be ambiguous and confusing.

The Human Rights Campaign, which is a global leader in promoting LGBTQ+ rights, offers a glossary of nearly thirty gender-related words."¹³

A few words can lead to understanding. Many words can lead to confusion. Even the letters in the acronym vary from person to person. Common to all is L.G.B.T. (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender). Less common is Q (queer), I (intersex), and A (asexual). The inclusion of "+" seems to be a sign of openness to any other gender identity that one claims for themselves. For this paper, when quoting a source, I will use the acronym of the original author. Otherwise, I will use LGBT for consistency.

It becomes a language of its own. In the story of the Tower of Babel,¹⁴ God separates the people by confusing their speech. Is the devil dividing us today by confusing our speech, inventing words that mean different things to different people?

¹⁰ John 8:11.

¹¹ West, Christopher, *Good News About Sex & Marriage: Answers to Your Honest Questions About Catholic Teaching*, Updated, Revised, and Expanded Edition. Cincinnati: Servant Publishing/Franciscan Media. 2018. 54.

¹² For more on the importance of bridge building, see my article, "We Need Bridge Builders", (August 29, 2023), at <http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=9585>.

¹³ West, 15.

¹⁴ Genesis 11:1-9

In his recent pastoral letter to his diocese, Archbishop Coakley writes,

What tremendous suffering it must be to feel a lack of congruity between one's sex and gender! We must tread lightly and with great compassion as we seek truth related to situations filled with pain."¹⁵ (Archbishop Coakley, 4).

We must not leave others to suffer alone. As Paul writes, "*If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.*"¹⁶ We must not drive people away from Jesus who are labored and burdened by gender confusion. We must share Jesus' invitation to be his people with them

Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."¹⁷

We must help those who struggle with gender confusion see Christianity as a yoke to help them to the truth rather than a burden or source of rejection. If we want to help them change, we must find a way to be welcoming. Their feeling "transgendered" is no more a sin than having a homosexual inclination, which in the Church is not a sin.¹⁸ It only becomes a sin when we engage in acts contrary to God's will.

Evert writes

Thanks be to God, a person's holiness does not depend on the absence of gender dysphoria. In fact, the Old Testament speaks of individuals who were eunuchs.¹⁹

This article is about gender identity rather than sexual activity. Here I will make a brief comment only to say that if one's gender confusion leads them to engage in sexual activity with others outside of a Catholic marriage between a man and a woman, then one must evaluate their actions in light of the Sixth Commandment, you shall not commit adultery.²⁰

¹⁵ Coakley, Most Rev. Paul S. (Archbishop of Oklahoma City), "Pastoral Letter: On the Unity of the Body and Soul: Accompanying Those Experiencing Gender Dysphoria". April 30, 2023. Accessed online at https://files.ecatholic.com/20256/documents/2023/5/On%20the%20Unity%20of%20the%20Body%20and%20Soul_Archbishop%20Paul%20Coakley_Pastoral%20Letter_English_2023-1.pdf?t=1683124884000 . 4.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:26

¹⁷ Matthew 11:28-30

¹⁸ USCCB, Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care. November 14, 2006. https://www.usccb.org/resources/ministry-to-persons-of-homosexualiInclination_0.pdf . 5.

¹⁹ Evert, 219.

²⁰ See my article "Towards Dignity and Truth: Compassionate Dialogue on Homosexuality." Cf. Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13.

What Do We Mean by Freedom, Hate Speech, Tolerance, Dialogue, and Truth?

The early church faced a world that saw things very differently than Catholicism did. Western Civilization grew over time to embrace Christianity. Now, the world is again turning away from the Catholic perspective given to us by God.

Genuine dialogue requires a common understanding of terms. In the following section, we look at how our Catholic faith looks at these seemingly secular terms.

Proper Freedom

For many people today their definition of freedom is rooted in relativism which claims there is no universal truth. For them, freedom means to be able to do whatever one wants with perhaps one limitation possible, that you do not hurt anyone else. St. Pope John Paul II spoke of freedom during his 1995 visit to the United States

Would not doing so mean that America's founding documents no longer have any defining content, but are only the formal dressing of changing opinion? Would not doing so mean that tens of millions of Americans could no longer offer the contribution of their deepest convictions to the formation of public policy? Surely it is important for America *that the moral truths which make freedom possible* should be passed on to each new generation. Every generation of Americans needs to know that freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.²¹

Gaudium et Spes (GS), one of the main documents of the Second Vatican Council offers the following on freedom:

Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness. Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly; and rightly to be sure. *Often however they foster it perversely as a license for doing whatever pleases them, even if it is evil.* For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man remain "under the control of his own decisions," so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him. *Hence man's dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure.* Man achieves such dignity when, emancipating himself from all captivity to passion, he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and procures for himself through effective and skilful action, apt helps to that end. Since man's freedom has been damaged by sin, only by the aid of God's grace can he bring such a relationship with God into full flower.

²¹ Pope John Paul II, "Homily of his holiness John Paul II" during his Apostolic Journey to America. Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Baltimore. October 8, 1995. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19951008_baltimore.html. 7. My emphasis.

Before the judgement seat of God each man must render an account of his own life, whether he has done good or evil.²²

Proper application of freedom relies on a well-formed conscience. It also relies on truth, the truth that God has given us. Before we talk about truth, we need to discuss hate.

Hate Speech

Those who promote the LGBT lifestyle condemn anything against modern gender ideology as promoting hate. It is wrong to promote acts of hate (violence) towards those living a LGBT lifestyle and distinctly unchristian. However, sharing our Catholic teaching against modern gender ideology is not hate. It is an act of love to help people understand why something is wrong.

Those who struggle with their gender identity can face hate from the very people who are called to help and love them. Here are some statistics paraphrased from *Unraveling Gender* by John Grabowski.²³

- Most LGBTQ+ people face rejection from family (57%)
- 50% are harassed at school
- 65% suffer violence

These people face more than enough hate already. We need to show them love. We can agree that anything that promotes physical attacks against someone because they identify as LGBT is wrong. However, to tell someone that they are doing something against God's Will is not hate. In fact, "It's an act of love to share the moral path with others."²⁴ Our goal is to lead them to salvation. We do this because of love. We act as the sentinel in Ezekiel 3:17-21 to warn them of the dangers they choose. I wonder if hiding the truth about what God says about gender could be an act of hate because it allows them to continue what is displeasing to God.

Tolerance

Those who embrace the modern notion of freedom speak of "tolerance" as saying anything goes. Tolerance does not mean saying what they do is acceptable. One can be tolerant and still offer one's own perspective of what is right and wrong. Tolerance means allowing them to make their own choices. However, as Bishop Porteous writes,

The cries for tolerance by some minority groups quickly changes to a demand for total endorsement of their identity and agenda."²⁵

²² Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*. Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965. Available online at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, 17. My emphasis.

²³ Grabowski, John S., *Unraveling Gender: The Battle Over Sexual Difference*. Gastonia, NC:TAN Books. 2022. 14-15.

²⁴ Sri, Edward, *Who am I to Judge? Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press and Greenwood Village, CO: Augustine Institute. 2016. 113.

²⁵ Elliott, Most Rev. Peter J., *The Sexual Revolution: History – Ideology – Power*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2023. 8. (Foreword to *The Sexual Revolution*, foreword by Most. Rev. Julian Porteous, Archbishop of Hobart.)

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says,

*You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **But I say to you, love your enemies,** and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.²⁶*

Two things come to mind. One, who is our enemy and, secondly, if we love them, how are they our enemy? For the latter, if in loving them, they stop being our enemy, thanks be to God. As to the former, John Grabowski offers some thoughts on who our enemy is and is not in the “battle” with gender ideology. As Grabowski says, “The opponents in the battle are not people who identify as LGBTQ+.”²⁷ He later writes of LGBT activists,

These activists, however, are ultimately not the opponents in this battle to which the Church’s warnings draw our attention. Rather, it is the ideas that they promote and disseminate, and the spiritual roots of these ideas, that are the primary opponents in this battle... Our battle is against the powers of evil – sin and the devil - in ourselves, and in the world around us (see Eph 6:10-17). Other human beings are not the real enemy in this battle.²⁸

(It is important to realize that not everyone who falls in the LGBT spectrum wants to be an activist. Some just want to be free to live their own lives.) Some readers may want to see LGBT activists as an “enemy.” Remember the saying, “hate the sin, love the sinner.”

It is possible for people who disagree about modern gender ideology to engage in dialogue. We see this actually happen in the story of Anna Katherine Howell in Pinedo’s article, “Why a same-sex-attracted Catholic spoke out against ‘Pride Mass’ and in defense of Church teaching.”²⁹ Howell had entered into a same-sex “marriage” before beginning graduate studies in anticipation of becoming an Episcopal priest. She knew that her advisor did not approve of same-sex relationships but they were able to work together and dialogue well. She even joined his family regularly for Sunday lunch where

Finally, Howell asked her adviser to explain the Catholic Church’s stance on homosexual marriage and was surprised by his logical response.

“He talked very logically and rationally without attacking or disrespecting,” Howell said. “It was uncomfortable in that I was being challenged and that is never comfortable, but he wasn’t

²⁶ Matthew 5:43-48.

²⁷ Grabowski, 13.

²⁸ Grabowski, 17.

²⁹ Pinedo, Peter, “Why a same-sex-attracted Catholic spoke out against ‘Pride Mass’ and in defense of Church teaching.” June 16, 2023. Catholic News Agency. Online at https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/254590/why-a-same-sex-attracted-catholic-spoke-out-against-pride-mass-and-in-defense-of-church-teaching?fbclid=IwAR3M1Y3muPyBIIR-4AkTpKhh_mbl1VNEXe8BGE63BI8SKJaMqv8bNCICVG0. Access date June 19, 2023.

unkind at any point. He was also not unclear at any point. At no point did he leave me doubting what the Church taught.

At the end of it, Howell said she started to cry. Her adviser was concerned he had been too harsh, to which Howell said she responded: “No, I think I’m wrong.”

I started to see what I now call ‘the grid,’” Howell said. “With Catholicism there’s a whole kind of underlying logical framework and every belief and every position fits into that framework and kind of interlocks.³⁰

They had learned to be able to *dialogue* with each other. It was *genuine*, not just two people exchanging monologues (more on this shortly). They really listened and spoke the truth from the heart. This led to her conversion.

The secular world’s perspective on gender ideology has changed very rapidly in recent decades. The speed of this change should lead us to ask ourselves if it is real or have we gone out of control down a slippery slope. In 1996 the United States passed the Defense of Marriage Act defining marriage as solely between a male and a female. *Just* twenty years later, many of the same members of Congress who had supported the Defense of Marriage Act now supported same-sex marriage. They got their wish when the U.S. Supreme Court erroneously declared same-sex marriage the law of the land. While there was rapid and uncontrolled change, we should realize that gender issues are not brand new. Evert tells us

More than two thousand years ago, the Roman emperor Elagabalus claimed that he was a woman and preferred to be called a lady rather than a lord.³¹

and

Saint Augustine also mentioned individuals who had intersex conditions.³²

Going back even further

Thanks be to God, a person’s holiness does not depend on the absence of gender dysphoria. In fact, the Old Testament speaks of individuals who were eunuchs.³³

Genuine Dialogue

I have already begun to speak about the importance of dialogue. What does *genuine* dialogue entail? It is not what Pope Francis refers to as exchanging monologues.

Dialogue is often confused with something quite different: the feverish exchange of opinions on social networks, frequently based on media information that is not always reliable. These exchanges are merely parallel monologues. They may attract some attention by their sharp and

³⁰ Pinedo, Peter, “Why a same-sex.”

³¹ Evert, Jason, *Male, Female, Other/ A Catholic Guide to Understanding Gender*. Scottsdale, AZ: Totus Tuus Press. 2022. 81.

³² Evert, 82.

³³ Evert, 219.

aggressive tone. But monologues engage no one, and their content is frequently self-serving and contradictory.³⁴

What's missing in these exchanging monologues? Two things, we aren't really listening to the other person, and compassion. Fr. Wessman writes

Why was *I* so easily triggered by particular political topics or the mere mention of certain politicians? Why did my heart fill with frustration when this or that Church official spoke? What happened to my ability to listen charitably to differing opinions and thoughts?³⁵

We should speak with passion for our beliefs. We must listen with the heart of Christ. We listen to the concerns of others so that we might address them while holding to God's Truth. We must speak with the heart of Christ. The "cancel culture" of simply ignoring others who do not agree with us is not Christian. Everyone has the same dignity given by God. We must treat others as children of God. This helps lead us to what Fr. Wessman says when he writes

They are seeking the right conditions such that there can be a mutual exchange between them and those they engage. This mutual exchange will often include dialogue where both parties speak and are heard.³⁶

Fear can keep us from real dialogue in two ways. We can fear being ridiculed for our beliefs and we may fear that we do not know enough about our faith to provide an explanation for our beliefs. Regarding both of these, we read in 1 Peter 3:13-16

Now who is going to harm you if you are enthusiastic for what is good? But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you. Do not be afraid or terrified with fear of them, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame.

The Truth Will Set You Free

Relativism says there is no universal truth. Relativists think that we limit the freedom of others when we "impose" our truth on them. We do not wish to impose our truth on anyone. We offer them truth. Jesus speaks of "truth" in John 8:32.

If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

It is in embracing the truth God offers us that we are created that we can find peace and joy as fruits of the Holy Spirit. Jesus says

³⁴ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*. HijezGlobal Press, Cottbus, Germany (copyright 2020) or online at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratellitutti.html. 200.

³⁵ Wessman, 15, my emphasis.

³⁶ Wessman, 194.

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.*³⁷

We believe in faith. In faith we seek understanding. God gives us the truth. God wants us to listen to others with compassion in order to help them know the truth He offers them.

Some people who are not Christian themselves see what Jesus says as one voice among many. Without faith, they ask why they should listen to Jesus. We find an answer to that in John 15:13.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Yes, you can hear different voices from various people. Who, besides Jesus, has laid down their life for you? This is precisely what Jesus does for us on the Cross. The Crucifixion demonstrates his absolute love for us. *Listen to him.*³⁸

In talking about truth, we can talk about objective truth and subjective truth. Objective truth is based on external measurable reality. $2 + 2 = 4$. Nothing can change this, that is unless you change the very meaning of “2”, “plus”, “=”, and “4”. If we can individually change the meaning of words, nothing means anything.

Subjective truth is based on feelings and interpretation. Our feelings and interpretation are important but they do not trump objective truth. We will discuss later how the external realities of our body say something about who we are as objective truth. Modern gender theory relies more on what one feels than what one's body tells them. West says that when we choose subjective truth over objective truth, we are making ourselves like God.³⁹

Archbishop Coakley writes

As I write this letter, many leaders in the United States are stridently promoting what has been dubbed “gender affirming therapy,” which seeks to bring the body into alignment with one's felt gender rather than working to align one's felt gender with biological reality.⁴⁰

The latter is in keeping with our Catholic faith.

There are those who say that everyone must be free to define their own truth. Justice Kennedy is among them when he writes in a court decision

at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.⁴¹

³⁷ Matthew 5:6

³⁸ For more on which voice we should listen to, see my video presentation, *Where Do We Go for Truth?* at <http://www.renewaloffaith.org/video---where-do-we-go-for-truth.html> and/or my article, “Many Voices: Who Should We Listen To?” at <http://nebula.wsimg.com/b73c44d450096da94ad9c9ca83fde363?AccessKeyId=F465FCE598BCE1CD661B&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

³⁹ West, 168.

⁴⁰ Archbishop Coakley, 6.

⁴¹ Reilly, Robert R., *America on Trial A Defense of the Founding*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2020.

How can each person decide for themselves the meaning of the universe and the mystery of human life? Don't we all live in the same universe? Isn't human life the same for all? Does there not need to be one universal truth on these topics?

6. Interior quote "Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. et al., v. Casey, Governor of Pennsylvania, et a, 505 U.S. 833, 851 (1992) <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/91-744.ZS.html>.

Essential Catholic Principles For Understanding Gender

In my presentation, *Where Do We Go for Truth*, I list friends, family, teachers, government, or majority opinion as sources that we might consider when trying to find answers. Then, I present the source of real truth, God.⁴² So, we need to examine what our Catholic faith offers on gender.

Gender has become a very complex topic. To understand what/why our Catholic faith says about gender, it is necessary to understand several different aspects of Catholic theology ranging from the dignity of all life to the significance of the Incarnation of Jesus.

Christianity is More Than Just Rules

Christianity is not a series of rules that we must follow to appease God so that we can get into Heaven or so that God does not destroy us. Christianity is about having a loving relationship with God. God is a loving Father, not a dictator that we should fear. How many times do we hear God say, “Do not be afraid”?

God does not give us commandments to gain something for himself. God has nothing to gain for himself. God’s motivation in giving us commandments is what is good for us.⁴³ In Deuteronomy 4:6, we read

Observe them carefully, for this is your wisdom and discernment in the sight of the peoples, who will hear of all these statutes and say, “This great nation is truly a wise and discerning people.”

For example, the Seventh Commandment is you shall not steal. Is this not a good commandment? How can we function as a society if everyone is stealing from everyone? We need to be able to trust that others will not steal. We also need to be able to trust that they will not lie to us (Eighth Commandment). Are there people who steal and lie? Yes, and it hurts us as a society.

Reason shows us that these commandments are good. However, reason is not always enough. There are times that we follow a commandment that we might not understand. We do so because we have faith in God. We can count on God to tell us what the truth really is.

Understood properly, the commandments are not just rules. They are a way of life.⁴⁴ To those who say

Only people who can’t think for themselves blindly follow what their church says.⁴⁵

To believe in faith based on what God has done in the past is not blind faith. Sri continues

⁴² Tunncliff, *Where Do We Go for Truth?*

⁴³ Cf. Sri, 64.

⁴⁴ For more on the commandments and the Beatitudes as a way of life, see my video presentation, *Are They Rules or a Way of Life?* (2/4/2019) online at <http://www.renewaloffaith.org/video---are-they-rules-or-a-way-of-life-.html>.

⁴⁵ Sri, 61. My emphasis.

God's moral law is like an instruction manual for our lives. When we purchase a car, we receive an owner's manual that **tells how best to operate** the vehicle.⁴⁶

God has a plan for us.

*For I know well the plans I have in mind for you—oracle of the LORD—plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope.*⁴⁷

To reach what God has planned for us, eternal life, we are called to trust in him. Sri was not always a full and practicing Catholic.

Over time, thankfully, through good friends, mentors, teachers, priests, and books, I eventually came to see more clearly the beauty of the Catholic moral vision. It makes sense out of life. It points to what makes us truly happy...It also encourages us to face the truth about ourselves—our faults, our weaknesses, our sins – in light of the truth about God's unwavering love for us. It thus leads us to a profound encounter with Christ's mercy.⁴⁸

The Dignity of All Life

Dignity is not something we earn. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. **God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end**: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.⁴⁹

God loves everyone no matter their sins. This includes people who struggle with confusion about their gender.

These individuals are made in the image and likeness of God and are offered redemption in Christ, and they too have the same human dignity and value as all other persons. They deserve to be treated with respect and charity.⁵⁰

People who struggle with gender confusion do not need judgment.⁵¹ What they need is truth and accompaniment.

Accompaniment requires us “to love and accept all people in a way that invites each person to a deeper relationship with Christ and a greater alignment of their lives with his teachings.”⁵²

⁴⁶ Sri, 65

⁴⁷ Jeremiah 29:11.

⁴⁸ Sri, x.

⁴⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church. Second Edition.* (CCC) Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997. 2258, my emphasis.

⁵⁰ Grabowski, 17. Cf. West, 144.

⁵¹ See the Parable of the Weeds Matthew 13:24-43.

⁵² Archbishop Coakley, 1.

We cannot and should not look at one's gender identity as defining their whole identity. It is just one part of the person. We must look at the whole person.

Whole Person

In my article on homosexuality, I wrote

We need to look at the whole person. If a person defines their entire identity by one aspect of their life, such as homosexual inclinations, then they may make themselves a slave to it.⁵³

The same is true of anyone who struggles with any form of gender confusion. Not every person who identifies somewhere on the LGBT spectrum wants to be an activist. Many are just looking for the same thing as a heterosexual person, to be whole and to have peace and joy in their heart. They never asked to struggle with their gender.

So, what leads to this struggle?

Original Sin caused a rupture in the unity of body and soul.⁵⁴

Before the original sin⁵⁵, man and woman were at peace. Sin breaks that peace and clouds our eyesight of our own humanity. The body and soul become in conflict.⁵⁶

While the gender of a person is not the sum total of who they are

Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul.⁵⁷

Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual *identity*. Physical, moral, and spiritual *difference* and *complementarity* are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life.⁵⁸

Howell, who, if you remember from above, was once in a same-sex relationship states

I don't want to be called by my sin. I don't think any sinner wants to be called by their sin," she said. "The devil knows our name but calls us by our sins. God knows our sins but calls us by our name."⁵⁹

What Does the Bible Say About Gender Identity

The Bible does offer us truth about homosexual acts as sinful. You can read about that in my already mentioned article on homosexuality, "Towards Dignity and Truth: Compassionate Dialogue on Homosexuality."

⁵³ Tunnickliff, "Homosexuality", 2, see USCCB guidelines on Pastoral Care to Homosexuals, 22.

⁵⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing. 2006. Hereafter identified as U.S. Catechism. 413. Cf. 68.

⁵⁵ For more on original sin, see my article, "Original Sin and the Question of Limbo" on my website at <http://www.renewaloffaith.org/original-sin.html>.

⁵⁶ See USCCB Committee on Doctrine, 4 for more on this body-soul unity.

⁵⁷ CCC 2332 <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/562/>. Cf. CCC, 2339.

⁵⁸ CCC, 2333. <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/562/>

⁵⁹ Pinedo, "Why a Same-sex".

The Bible does not speak specifically on gender identity. Neither does the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* first written in 1994. In 1994, gender identity was not the issue it is today. While neither speaks explicitly of gender identity, both provide foundational material in understanding gender.

For the definitive Bible verses on the Catholic understanding of gender we go back to the stories of creation in Genesis.

*God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*⁶⁰

To which He said

*God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good.*⁶¹

God created them male and female and saw that it was very good. Only two genders are mentioned, not three, four, thirty, or a hundred. In the second story of creation we read

*The LORD God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him.*⁶²

And

*The LORD God then built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman. When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of man this one has been taken." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.*⁶³

God created man not to be alone. To find fulfillment, the man needed a suitable partner. One that was of the same substance (i.e. the rib) yet different in a way that they would **complement one another** so that they might become one flesh. The male and female body are made to complement one another in the way they come together sexually but the complementary nature is more than external body parts.⁶⁴ It includes who they are on the inside. It includes the whole person. As Grabowski writes concerning when Adam sees Eve

Rather, for the first time, he recognizes the meaning of his sexually differentiated body in light of her...Conversely, she too discovers the meaning of her reality as *issah* (woman) in him. Sexual difference is thus revealed to be relational – ordering human persons toward one another.⁶⁵

It is only together that we discover who we are.

⁶⁰ Genesis 1:27.

⁶¹ Genesis 1:31.

⁶² Genesis 2:18.

⁶³ Genesis 2:22-25.

⁶⁴ CCC, 2357. Cf. Romans 1:25-27.

⁶⁵ Grabowski, 141.

We experience our selfhood through our bodies...Pope John Paul II calls the capacity of the male body and the female body to serve mutual self-giving the nuptial meaning of the body.⁶⁶

Even though they were naked, together they felt no shame, that is until the serpent tempted them and they sinned when they ate the forbidden fruit.

Here the seemingly endless struggle between good and evil is described in the imagery of the serpent tempting Adam and Eve with the forbidden fruit.⁶⁷

So began the struggle of human sexuality that will continue as long as humanity lives in a sinful world.

Catholicism's Sacramental Worldview

Our Catholic worldview is that things matter. They signify something. Water symbolizes cleansing and life. Oils symbolize strengthening. God is evident in the things He has created.

Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made.⁶⁸

What does this mean in understanding gender? ***Our bodies matter***. Our bodies say something about who we are, not just in this world but in eternal life when we will rise body and soul together.

Christ's resurrection from the dead makes clear that creation, the body, and sexual difference will be perfected – not erased – in the new heaven and the new earth that we await at the culmination of history.⁶⁹

Jesus shows us this when He showed Thomas his hands and his feet after his Resurrection (John 20:27) and when He ate fish in front of his disciples (Luke 24:42-43).

This sacramental view of the world shows how our Catholic morality is not based on simply what the majority think or what those who hold worldly power (“positivism”) think. It is based on the way God created the world.⁷⁰

Is the body good or is it part of evil? Jesus became incarnate in the flesh to redeem the flesh to the original “good” that God had created.

Incarnational Theology

Jesus was divine. He was with God but He

*did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance.*⁷¹

⁶⁶ U.S. Catechism, 412.

⁶⁷ U.S. Catechism, 68.

⁶⁸ Romans 1:20.

⁶⁹ Grabowski, 109.

⁷⁰ My blog article, “We Need to See as God Sees”.

⁷¹ Philippians 2:6b-7

He became incarnate in the flesh *to save us*. Everyone celebrates Christmas but do we get the significance of God becoming man, “*And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*”?⁷² I think of the Incarnation during the offertory prayer at Mass when I say (as the priest) quietly when pouring the water into the wine

By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.⁷³

Jesus shows the human body to be good by becoming human himself in the Incarnation. Anything that treats the body as an object and forgets the person is not good. For example, pornography is bad because of its focus on the body without any regard to the person, to the soul.

From this perspective, the problem with pornography is not that it reveals too much of the person, but that it reveals far too little.⁷⁴

The body is a gift but not in and of itself but because it is part of the whole person. If we are to see as God sees, we must see the whole person. Gnosticism sees the body as evil and thus is a heresy against Christianity.

⁷² John 1:14.

⁷³ *The Roman Missal, English Translation According to the Third Typical Edition*. New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp. 201.

⁷⁴ West, 74.

From the Incarnation to Gender Ideology

Gnosticism

Gnosticism was a heresy the early church faced. Grabowski describes this heresy

At its heart, Gnosticism explained the universe through metaphysical dualism: spirit is good and matter is evil and illusory. The material world was the work of an evil, inferior god who seeks to trap humans within ignorance and illusion.⁷⁵

Since matter was evil, the body was evil. Fortunately, Christianity prevailed (Thanks be to God) and Gnosticism did not become the predominant religion. Unfortunately, it has reared its ugly head from time to time.⁷⁶ Its presence is made visible today. Grabowski writes

Ultimately, gender ideology is best understood as a modern expression of Gnosticism, the ancient heresy that opposes Christian conceptions of creation, the Incarnation, the body, and sexual difference.⁷⁷

Our faith says the biology of our bodies reveals our gender. The sex of our genitals at birth is observable as physical fact and thus is objective truth. Modern gender ideology says we can ignore that objective truth and go with what we feel like. If one feels like a female, even if they are born with male genitalia, they “are female.” This embraces Gnosticism in saying that we cannot trust what the body (matter) says. Perhaps we could ask the question, if the sex of the material body does not matter, then why bother to use cross-sex hormones or have surgery to change the genitals of one’s body to the opposite sex?

One of the red flags that I see against gender ideology is the speed of which the ideology has changed in recent years. I have already mentioned the change from the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act prohibiting same-sex marriage to the US Supreme Court decision just twenty years later making it the law of the land. The LGBT lifestyle is not just acceptable today, it is encouraged and promoted. In fact, if one speaks against it, one is condemned as judgmental and old-fashioned. On what basis? Relativism and mistaken notions of freedom.

Sexual Revolution

It is a fact that much has changed in the last twenty years but to understand how it came to be, we need to go back further in time. It began with the sexual revolution.

Commonly, the sexual revolution is dated to the 1960’s. Bishop Elliott presents a much longer history to it, dating its origins back to the Enlightenment.⁷⁸

A pivotal moment leading to the sexual revolution came with the efforts of people like Margaret Sanger who sought to control fertility.⁷⁹ At the same time, the Industrial Revolution led us from

⁷⁵ Grabowski, 111.

⁷⁶ A fuller discussion on Gnosticism is beyond the scope of this article. If you are interested in more, I recommend Grabowski’s book, *Unraveling Gender*, which I cite throughout this article..

⁷⁷ Grabowski, 9.

⁷⁸ Elliot, 15, 17.

⁷⁹ Elliot, 27. Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*.

seeing children as a blessing who contributed to family income “to one that saw them as a burden and a net drain on the family’s economic well-being’,”⁸⁰

This would lead to the separation of sex and fertility. Sex moved from being rooted in procreation to only a matter of physical pleasure. If sex does not involve procreation, then it does not need to be limited to/rooted in being between a male and a female.

Other critical factors included by Bishop Elliot include “the rejection of God, at least a God who is involved in our lives” and “a radical change in understanding the nature of the human person.”⁸¹ One must also consider modern notions of autonomy and individualism and separation of the body and soul.⁸² If sex is centered on physical pleasure, then the other person can be seen as nothing more than a means to achieve that pleasure. It objectifies the person. “Radical technological development of the media ultimately has led to *universal access to pornography*.”⁸³ The modern accessibility to pornography accelerated the objectification of the person/body.

Feminism

To understand gender ideology, it is important to consider feminism. My comments on feminism are centered on Favale’s, *The Genesis of Gender*.⁸⁴ In chapter one entitled “Heretic” she describes her life as raised as an evangelical Christian who wanted to be a traditional mom but who worked outside the home. In college she was swept into feminism and studied feminism in graduate school and taught it for a few years. When she converted to Catholicism, she expected to be a cafeteria Catholic who believed what she wanted of Catholic teaching and set aside that with which she did not agree until

My conscience started to rebel. The progressive beliefs I was carrying began to feel less like personal belongings and more like baggage: burdensome and out of place.⁸⁵

Two crucial points in understanding her perspective are found in her statements:

In the essay, Butler rolls out her concept of gender performativity: gender as something we *do*, rather than something we *are*.⁸⁶

The difference between “do” and “are” is the depth of what it means to be human. “Do” refers to the actions of our body. “Are” refers to the depths of our soul. The two go together.

And

I saw Christianity as a narrative created by human beings and therefore open to revision by other human beings, like myself.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Grabowski, 85.

⁸¹ Elliot, 39.

⁸² Elliot, 43.

⁸³ Elliot, 55.

⁸⁴ Favale, Abigail, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2022.

⁸⁵ Favale, 11.

⁸⁶ Favale, 12.

⁸⁷ Favale, 24.

Feminism is seen as coming in the three waves:

1. Fought for women's suffrage⁸⁸ and opposed abortion⁸⁹
2. Sought reproductive freedom and became divided on abortion⁹⁰
3. Women, as well as men, should enjoy "uninhibited sexual freedom"⁹¹ "

Crucial to the development of modern feminism is the rejection of stereotypes that defined what it meant to be male or female. Archbishop Coakley writes

If gender is to serve the individual, it must neither be confined to rigid stereotypes nor untethered from the sex that grounds its meaning.⁹²

How Many Genders?

There are those who believe there is more than one gender. In fact

In November of 2019, the International Law Commission of the United Nations (U.N.) proposed a new treaty defining crimes against humanity that would officially recognize 100 different genders. This would replace the 1998 Rome Statute that identified "gender" as "man and woman in the context of society."⁹³

If there are 100 genders, then how is anyone supposed to know what their gender is? It would seem impossible. This does not seem reasonable. For the rest of this article, I will hold to two genders based on two factors:

1. Objective observation of physical body features, external genitalia and internal reproductive organ structure.
2. What the Bible tells us in Genesis 1:27 as God created - *God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Male or Female??

What does it mean to be a male? What does it mean to be a female?

Pope Francis has said that gender ideology is "one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations" today... "Why is it dangerous? Because it blurs differences and the value of men and women," he added."⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Favale, 57.

⁸⁹ Favale, 58, cf. Grabowski, 64

⁹⁰ Favale, 58.

⁹¹ Favale, 59.

⁹² Coakley, 3.

⁹³ Grabowski, 33 Here is Grabowski's source –Assembly Inches Toward Redefining Gender as Social Construct," Center for Family and Human Rights, *Friday Fax*, vol. 22, his source "See Stefano Gennarini, "General No. 45 (November 7, 2019): https://c-fam.org/Friday_fax/general-assembly-inches-toward-redefining-gender-as-social-construct/

⁹⁴ Mares, Courtney, "Pope Francis: Gender ideology is 'one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations' today." March 11, 2023. Catholic News Agency. Online at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253845/pope-francis-gender-ideology-is-one-of-the-most-dangerous-ideological-colonizations-today>. Access date July 21, 2023.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith insists that the importance and the meaning of sexual difference, as a reality deeply inscribed in man and woman, needs to be noted. “Sexuality characterizes man and woman not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual, making its mark on each of their expressions.” It cannot be reduced to a pure and insignificant biological fact, but rather “is a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being.”⁹⁵

The determination of one’s gender is evident in the external genitalia with which one is born but is both deeper and more complex than that. It is more complex biologically in the way the external genitals work with internal organs to make reproduction possible. It is deeper in the way our soul is involved.

Originally, the Greek root of the word “gender” meant “the manner in which one generates.”⁹⁶

Favale discusses her own quest to determine what it meant for her to call herself “female.”⁹⁷ If one sees one’s role in procreation, a challenge arises for a person who is infertile or a woman who is incapable of carrying a pregnancy to completion. Favale found the answer to this in “potentiality”.

The tool I lacked in my analytical toolbox was this: The crucial distinction between potentiality and actuality.⁹⁸

Potentiality solves this problem. A woman is the kind of human being whose body is organized around the potential to gestate new life That’s the lively tension we need to inhabit: to remain rooted in the body but not reduced to the body.⁹⁹

In Genesis 1:20 we read

God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply.

God created male and female so that together they might be fertile and have children. Sometimes there are medical problems that make the birth of biological children not possible. Infertility does not change the couple to something other than male and female. Infertility is a medical issue, not a gender issue.

What about people who feel like inside they are something other than male and female. Favale spent time wondering what gender is.

⁹⁵ USCCB Committee on Doctrine, 5. The document provides the source for its interior quote from Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World (2004), no. 8

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040731_collaboration_en.html); quotations from Congregation for Catholic Education, Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education (1983), no. 5 and no. 4, respectively

⁹⁶ Evert, 15.

⁹⁷ Favale, 117ff.

⁹⁸ Favale, 119.

⁹⁹ Favale, 120-121.

The more I study what gender has become, the more it feels like an empty signifier, a word that is only a shell, conveniently waiting to be filled with whatever meaning is most useful.¹⁰⁰

What lies in a word? Who determines its meaning? I've already mentioned some of the terms that people have come up with to address gender. Favale includes a list of them including "agender" which refers to a person without gender. I wonder, with all that is said about gender, can one be without gender? Perhaps one is not inclined to be involved in typical gender relationship but does that mean they are without gender or are they simply called to a chaste celibate life? Favale also includes the terms "bigender" (having two genders) and "pangender" (meaning having a multitude of genders).¹⁰¹ Can one resolve the notion of being both male and female if there are many genders?

The words must mean something.

*"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more no less."*¹⁰²

If words mean nothing to anyone other than the one who came up with the word, then they really do not have any meaning at all, do they? Words are used for communication *between* people. Words cannot serve this purpose if they do not have a common meaning. It reminds me of the story of the Tower of Babel that I referred to earlier. The people became prideful and sought to build a tower to make a name for themselves. God responded

*Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that no one will understand the speech of another.*¹⁰³

Once their speech was confused (they spoke different languages), they could no longer communicate and work together. God did this to punish and humble their pride. Is the devil behind all the new words involving gender today? Is the devil putting them in people's heads to divide us? Why? As Jesus says

*Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste, and no town or house divided against itself will stand.*¹⁰⁴

Regarding how one feels about their gender, Favale writes

All of these definitions of gender are based on a subjective sense of identification, on how one "feels". But what does it mean to "feel" like a man or a woman or neither?¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Favale, 153.

¹⁰¹ Favale, 154-155.

¹⁰² Grabowski, 29, Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

¹⁰³ Genesis 11:7.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 12:25.

¹⁰⁵ Favale, 155.

Feminism fought against stereotypes. Certain behaviors may be more typically seen in males while other behaviors typically are seen in females. However, such behaviors do not make one male or female. Yet, as Favale writes

If girlness and boyness no longer reside in the body, there is no other ground for these concepts *except* stereotypes.¹⁰⁶

Has modern gender ideology embraced stereotypes, the very thing that feminism fought against?

Now, unmoored from the body altogether, gender is defined by the very cultural stereotypes that feminism sought to undo. In other words, when a girl recognizes that she does not fit the stereotypes of girlhood, she is now invited to question her sex rather than the stereotype.¹⁰⁷

Regarding stereotypes, West writes

As Anderson reports, gender dysphoria in children can be a sign of anxiety about the roles, attitudes, or characteristics they mistakenly assume are a fixed part of their sex, but are actually rooted in rigid and misleading stereotypes.¹⁰⁸

There are some people who think Catholicism is stuck in the past on the role of women. Grabowski writes

The Church is not advocating for sex stereotyping. A man who does housework or is a stay-at-home dad does not cease to be a man. A woman who plays competitive sports does not cease to be a woman.¹⁰⁹

Favale then writes

When I read these accounts of femaleness, I feel like I want to hide; I want the visibly female features of my body to dissolve and dissolve and disappear entirely. If this is what it means to be a woman – to be degraded, dominated, depersonalized, reduced to an object for someone else’s use – then I want no part in it...These young women are rebelling, understandably, against the hypersexualization of the female body, but in doing so, they are turning against the body itself.¹¹⁰

This is a genuine feeling! There are women today who have “top surgery”, in this case breast removal just so they are not seen as an object based on their breasts. Favale did not perceive that option. Her breasts were there to stay.

That was a given, and so I learned instead to live with breasts, rather than be rid of them. Because of this, I’ve had the gift of experiencing their *telos*; sources of life and sweet milk for my babies...I now understand that breasts are visible signs of feminine self-gift, the capacity

¹⁰⁶ Favale, 158.

¹⁰⁷ Favale, 158.

¹⁰⁸ West, 179.

¹⁰⁹ Grabowski, 159.

¹¹⁰ Favale, 173.

and call to nourish the souls and bodies – the full personhood – of those who come under our care.¹¹¹

Female breasts serve a genuine purpose. It is not sexual. It is for the gift of nourishing their babies. It is part of what makes being a female special.

Before moving from what it means to be male or female to transgenderism itself, there is one more topic that needs to be discussed, the “intersex” condition.

Intersex

The discussion of Intersex is very complex as there is no accepted definition of what “intersex” is. Favale writes

The term is used in such a way to suggest that “intersex” refers to something completely outside the male/female binary, like some third-sex or non-sex category of persons who are neither male nor female, or somehow both male *and* female.¹¹²

She continues

If “intersex” is used to invoke a category *in between* the sexes, it is a misnomer. However, the label can be accurately used when referring to a biologically based variation *within* maleness or femaleness.¹¹³

When I started reading on gender ideology, I had heard of people with physical attributes of both male and female gender. That is not intersex. It is hermaphroditism. According to Evert, “true hermaphroditism” has only occurred in about 500 cases.¹¹⁴

There are also people born whose genitals do not develop properly during pregnancy. This is known as Pseudohermaphroditism. This is a very small percentage of cases. Based on my reading, I do not think Pseudohermaphroditism is “intersex” either. They are either male or female.

I find intersex difficult to understand. Part of this is that I do not have the medical knowledge to understand it all. The other part is the way people have adapted and broadened the meaning of intersex. Perhaps by broadening the definition, they are attempting to make it seem more normal as it includes more people.

Favale writes

In fact, the five most common conditions that Fausto-Sterling categorizes as “intersex” do not actually involve instances of sexual ambiguity. When we restrict the category to

¹¹¹ Favale, 175.

¹¹² Favale, 124-125

¹¹³ Favale, 125.

¹¹⁴ Evert, 64.

include only such cases, the number plummets to 0.018% - a figure one hundred times lower than Fausto-Sterling's estimate.¹¹⁵

Grabowski writes on Intersex

These individuals have various genetic or hormonal conditions that impact their expression of sexual difference (external genitalia or secondary sex characteristics) or their ability to reproduce sexually (sometimes affecting the gonads or internal genitalia in addition to observable sexual characteristics). But the very term “intersex” describes someone who exists between the two sexes. The prefix *inter* comes from Latin and means “between,” “among,” or “in the midst of.” The existence of such persons does not negate the reality of two sexes – it reinforces it. In this case, the exception confirms the rule.¹¹⁶

It *almost seems* like they are trying to define the perfect “male” and the perfect “female.” Then, if you do not fit that description, you could be Intersex. Intersex is not a disease, condition, or disorder. While there are specific “conditions” that may fall under a definition of “Intersex,” Intersex itself is not.¹¹⁷

Transgender

This entire article is on Transgenderism so it might seem like a misnomer to call one section of it “Transgender.” However, while what I have written likely demonstrates my belief that there are just two genders, that does not mean that some people do not *feel* like they are a different gender than the one revealed to them by their physical bodies.

As we talk about transgenderism, we must recall that even if a person identifies as transgender in any form, it is not the whole of who they are. They have gifts that they use for whatever they choose to do as a career. They are a person with feelings and emotions who must be respected and treated with dignity. Even if they deny there is a God, they are a child of God who loves them and watches over them.

Regarding their faith, it may be their struggle with their gender confusion that may lead them to question if God exists, then why do they face this struggle.

*But who indeed are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Will what is made say to its maker, “Why have you created me so?”*¹¹⁸

Does such a person *mean* to “talk back to God” in a bad way? I doubt it. I think they genuinely struggle with understanding *who they are*. Despite those who see puberty as something to be “blocked”, a natural part of growing up is discovering who we are. This is not without its struggle.

While West writes

¹¹⁵ Favale, 126-127. Her statistic comes from Leonard Sax, “How Common is Intersex? A Response to Anne Fausto-Sterling”, *Journal of Sex Research* 39, no. 3 (2002): 174-78, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12476264> .

¹¹⁶ Grabowski, 31.

¹¹⁷ For more on “Intersex” see Evert who spends all of chapter 5 (pages 58-65) on intersex in his book *Male, Female, Other/ A Catholic Guide to Understanding Gender*.

¹¹⁸ Romans 9:20

We're not persons *in* a body. We're body-persons. The body *expresses* the soul. It makes visible the invisible.¹¹⁹

This does not mean our bodies and what we feel inside are always in perfect unity. This may be especially true if we rely too heavily on stereotypes. Just because a little girl is aggressive and gets into fights does not make her a boy. Just because a boy likes to play with dolls does not make him a girl.

In their struggle to understand who they are, a person who experiences gender confusion may think their body is lying to them. This does not mean they reject the objective truth of their body.

Divorcing one's identity from one's body does not heal that pain; it only masks it.¹²⁰

I think it is more likely in a world that incorporates relativism, that they do not understand the difference between objective truth (in this case, what their physical body tells them) and subjective truth (what their interpretation of what they feel inside tells them). They are taught that a person determines their own truth. They genuinely struggle with the conflict within them. Judging them does not help them. What they need is compassion and truth. They have a heavy cross to bear. We must not leave them to carry their cross alone. Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry his Cross.¹²¹ We are to help others. Conversely, we must realize that we are not their Savior, Jesus is. We must do what we can to point them to Jesus.

We have already discussed the problem of stereotypes in determining one's gender. What other factors might lead one to doubt that their gender matches what their body tells them? One of the classic considerations in determining what makes one an alcoholic or a homosexual is nature vs. nurture. What is determined by biology (nature) versus the way one is raised (nurture)?

On the nature side, biology does not cause one to be transgender. However, here one does need to consider the possibility of a medical issue during their pregnancy in their mother's womb where the genitalia do not properly develop (as mentioned above, this is called Pseudohermaphroditism). This does not change their gender. It may make it not clearly apparent.

Can the environment we grow up in affect one's perception of gender? Here Evert tells the story of John Money who grew up with a very abusive father.

Money explained that the experience of being lashed by his father helped to seal his lifelong rejection of "the brutality of manhood." After his father's death, John was raised by his mother and spinster aunts, whose incessant derogation of males made him feel guilty for being one.¹²²

Sadly, it is true that some people do grow up in abusive homes. Either parent can be abusive. Having an abusive father is not a reason to reject "manhood." In fact, being a male does not in any way mean one should be abusive. No one should be abusive for any reason. It is unfortunate

¹¹⁹ West, 84.

¹²⁰ West, 175.

¹²¹ Luke 23:26.

¹²² Evert, 101.

that we often assume what we experience from the males and females around us, we take to be proper behavior for their respective genders.

Another environmental factor that arises today from those who believe that the child must be free to determine their own gender is that they are never taught any sense of “maleness” or “femaleness.” It is a taboo topic until they decide for themselves. ***But how can they ever decide their gender for themselves if they are never taught anything about being male or female?***

Even worse than the physical abuse mentioned above is sexual abuse. It is a very sad thing when anyone is sexually abused by anyone. This should never happen. Sadly, the Catholic Church did not do all it could have in the past to prevent sexual abuse by clergy. If you, or anyone you know, has been a victim of this, ***I am truly sorry***. Sexual abuse is more than a physical attack against the body of the person. It is an attack against the whole person.

The victims will try to protect themselves from future attacks. Evert writes

For others, dissociating from one’s sex is a defense mechanism to become undesirable to those who might repeat the offense.¹²³

This includes those who feel they were attacked for the gender their body reveals to them. So, they reject either the gender subjectively, trying to appear as the opposite gender or to change their bodily appearance in the hopes of making themselves less desirable against future attacks. This might be complete gender transition surgery or perhaps just, for females, removal of their breasts.

Environmental facts also include parental relationships.

But if children do not form healthy bonds with their parents, they miss an important step in establishing their own sense of sexual identity...For example, one study showed that three out of four boys who experience gender dysphoria exhibit an insecure attachment to their mothers.¹²⁴

These are not the sum total of reasons that people think they are transgender. I cannot explain why everyone who identifies as transgender feels this way. However, it is absolutely necessary that we acknowledge the above considerations and help those who fall into these categories with the mental health assistance they need and deserve.

Two Cautions

We are about to move into a discussion of those who seek to change their gender. Before doing so, there are two items to note.

The first is the subject of those who are heterosexual in their inclinations and sexual relationships but enjoy dressing in clothes of the opposite sex. Bishop Elliot writes

However, another phenomenon should not be confused with gender transition. Men and women who adopt the clothing and appearance of the opposite sex are transvestites. They feel

¹²³ Evert, 164.

¹²⁴ Evert, 168.

comfortable in the role of the opposite sex, but they are well aware of their biological sex, which they usually accept.¹²⁵

Transvestites may fall on the LGBT spectrum but they are not transgender nor do they wish to change their gender.

The second is a very important note for anyone who uses medical means to change the appearance of their sex. While it is difficult for me to imagine, the reading shows that there are cases where people have “sex change surgery” and then subsequently seek medical treatment for “unrelated issues” without telling the doctor they are not the gender they present as. Evert advises us

Males and females also respond to drugs differently, both in terms of efficacy and side effects. Aspirin, for example, is more beneficial to women than men in preventing stroke, but more beneficial to men for preventing heart attacks. In the words of Dr. Maria Ferretti, “When properly documented and studied, sex and gender differences are the gateway to precision medicine.”¹²⁶

Every cell in the human body is either xx/xy (female or male). Our gender is part of our whole body, not just genitals and reproductive organs.

¹²⁵ Elliot, 70.

¹²⁶ Evert, 37.

Medical Considerations

Puberty Blockers

The number of youth identifying as transgender has changed greatly in recent years. Favale writes

Prior to the internet era, those seeking transition were typically natal males in their forties. In 2014, this began to change dramatically. By 2019, three times as many natal females were seeking transition, and most of them were teenagers...

Gender dysphoria among children and adolescents used to be exceptionally rare, affecting only 0.1% of kids, and those almost entirely boys. Prior to 2012, there is no scientific evidence of adolescent girls experiencing gender dysphoria at all...

In 2010, 138 patients were referred for gender treatment. In 2015, the number jumped to 1,409 and continued to climb steadily, reaching 2,748 referrals in the latest year on record, 2019-2020. In less than a decade, gender referrals had increased by almost 2,000%.¹²⁷

Those supporting modern gender ideology may wish to claim the increase is because of more acceptance of gender dysphoria.¹²⁸ Yet, it speaks to me of unfettered rapid change.¹²⁹

Moral and spiritual concerns aside *for a moment*, I am concerned medically about the use of puberty blockers. Puberty blockers were developed to arrest early onset puberty. This original use would rely on their use *only* until the child reached the natural age for puberty. At that time the puberty blockers would be stopped. In the cases of these young children puberty blockers are used to help the human body work as it is supposed to.

However, when puberty blockers are used for people who feel they are a different gender than what their body reveals to them, the person may need to take the puberty blockers indefinitely. Otherwise, the person would go into puberty and experience normal physical/sexual development. In these cases, puberty blockers are used to make the body function in a way other than it is designed to. Is it prudent to put someone on puberty blockers for an indefinite period of time? This is not natural. The human body is designed to go through puberty. In fact, it can be the very thing that helps the person sort out their gender identity. The human body needs to go through puberty for the person to become all that they are meant to be.

In fact, West writes

I'm sure you'll be encouraged by Anderson's well-documented finding that "the vast majority of children with gender dysphoria – 80 to 95 percent – naturally grow out of it, if they aren't encouraged to transition."¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Favale, 167.

¹²⁸ Cf. Evert, 81.

¹²⁹ See my recent blog article, "The Speed of Change", September 5, 2023.

<http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=9613>.

¹³⁰ West, 179, Anderson quote Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter, 2018. Page 119). Cf. Evert, 23, 114. Cf. Coakley, 6 and Grabowski, 37.5

The phrase, we need to let nature take its course fits here.

There are some who say that puberty blockers can be used to pause puberty while the person *decides* how they want to proceed. When are they capable of making the decision about their gender? If one cannot vote until they are eighteen and cannot legally drink until they are twenty-one, how are they supposed to be able to make a life decision about their gender?

How easy is it for someone to get puberty blockers or cross-sex hormones? Favale writes

The medical industry has adopted an “informed consent” model for dispensing these drugs, which means that someone can walk into a clinic, sign a consent form, and walk out with life-altering drugs. No diagnosis is necessary, and the “informed” part of the consent is not always thorough.¹³¹

Archbishop Coakley says the reality is

Others tout puberty blocking medications for adolescents as an option to “pause” their development. But in truth it is a transitioning on-ramp because more than 95 percent of children who use puberty blockers eventually transition to opposite sex hormones.¹³²

We should also be asking ourselves how proven and safe are puberty blockers. Archbishop Coakley writes.

It also is worth noting that puberty blockers and opposite-sex hormones are experimental, with long-term effects still unknown. Studies on how they impact a child’s brain development, bone mass, and fertility are only just beginning.¹³³

I mentioned above the question of the ability of a child/teen to make such a momentous decision. Some teens are actually pushed to use puberty blockers and/or cross sex hormones. Favale writes

Keira Bell, a twenty-three-year-old woman, brought legal action against the NHS-GIDS for putting her on puberty blockers at the age of sixteen, initiating a path of medicalization that would include a double mastectomy and years of cross-sex hormones.¹³⁴

She won her court case. The court said that kids under the age of sixteen are not capable of making these decisions. It also labeled the procedures as experimental.¹³⁵ On the other hand, in the United States, 8% of trans surgeries are on 12-18 year-old’s, a very permanent decision for someone so young.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Favale, 188.

¹³² Coakley, 7.

¹³³ Coakley, 7.

¹³⁴ Favale, 185.

¹³⁵ Favale, 186.

¹³⁶ Arnold, Tyler. “Study: Patients aged 12-18 account for 8% of trans surgeries.” August 30, 2023. Catholic News Agency. Online at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/255232/study-patients-aged-12-18-account-for-8-percent-of-trans-surgeries>.

Recognizing these treatments as experimental, we need to think about the ethics of the treatments. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states

Research or experimentation on the human being cannot legitimate acts that are in themselves contrary to the dignity of persons and to the moral law. The subjects' *potential consent does not justify such acts*. Experimentation on human beings is *not morally legitimate if it exposes the subject's life or physical and psychological integrity to disproportionate or avoidable risks*. Experimentation on human beings does not conform to the dignity of the person if it takes place *without the informed consent* of the subject or those who legitimately speak for him.¹³⁷

Does anyone tell them that these treatments are experimental? Human beings should not be guinea pigs for unproven treatments. Are they made aware of the potential side effects?

With any new procedure, speaking purely from a scientific position, the risk of side effects must be studied through proper scientific methods. Here are some of the negative effects associated with puberty blockers:

- They can lead to permanent sterility.¹³⁸
- They arrest critical brain and bone development natural during puberty.¹³⁹
- The makers of puberty blocking drugs such as Lupron and Supprelin warn that possible side effects include emotional instability, mood changes, aggression, nervousness, anxiety, agitation, confusion, delusions, insomnia, and depression, adding that you “monitor for development or worsening of psychiatric symptoms during treatment.”¹⁴⁰
- Studies also showed that puberty blockers cause memory problems and stunt brain development, which is the last thing a young person needs when making life-changing decisions about his or her future.¹⁴¹
- “Within three years of being on puberty blockers, the average girl will have bone density lower than 98 percent of children her age...Bone density needs to *increase* during adolescence. Children on puberty blockers also have lower spine mass density and can develop osteoporosis in their teens.”¹⁴²

With these side effects, it is no wonder that fourteen states presently have laws restricting these “treatments” on children.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ CCC, 2295.

¹³⁸ Favale, 186. Cf. Evert, 115.

¹³⁹ Favale, 186.

¹⁴⁰ Evert, 110.

¹⁴¹ Evert, 111.

¹⁴² Evert, 112.

¹⁴³ Pinedo, Peter, “Court upholds Alabama ban on child sex-change treatments.” Catholic News Agency. August 22, 2023. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/255162/court-upholds-alabama-ban-on-child-sex-change-treatments>.

Proper Diagnosis

Seeing these potential side effects, there should be great medical concern over their use (not to mention the moral concern). Are these children being used as guinea pigs for experimental treatments?¹⁴⁴ Are they being used to advance an agenda in favor of modern gender ideology?

I have already mentioned the ease of getting puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones. Favale tells how easy it was for Grace to get gender “treatments”.

When Grace went to a doctor for possible ADHD, the response was a “robust battery of tests” prior to diagnosis, and Grace was not put on medication until her eating disorder was in remission. With gender dysphoria, however, Grace was offered no robust assessment. She was not evaluated for any comorbid conditions prior to being diagnosed and prescribed life-altering drugs and surgery. Grace had a history of depression, isolation, sexual trauma, and disordered eating, but none of this was explored by her doctor or therapist in an effort to understand better the source of her pain.¹⁴⁵

Should not major flags be raised that it is easier to get treatment for gender dysphoria than for Attention-deficit/hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

I will discuss mental health assistance later. For now, I offer the following from Favale.

The affirmation approach encourages violence to the healthy body rather than carefully working through the underlying causes of psychological distress and considering ways to manage that distress that do not cause physical harm. In this model, the body is the scapegoat, blamed as the sole source of one’s pain and sacrificed on the altar of self-will.

What would it look like to approach a person in the depth of his complexity? In the fullness of her dignity? Such an approach would first seek to understand whether the person is actually suffering from gender dysphoria or whether there is something else going on.¹⁴⁶

Why are there not mental health screening requirements before offering these “treatments”? Should one’s mental health status be evaluated first to assure they are capable of making these decisions? For example, a person suffering from severe depression might be willing to try anything to escape the pain of their depression.

Cross-sex Hormones

From puberty blockers we move to cross-sex hormones. Just as with puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones force the body to be something it is not meant to be. West says this goes against the dignity of the human person.

But we do violate the dignity of the human person when we flood the body with hormones and perform mutilating surgeries in an attempt to make someone look like the opposite sex.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Evert offers discussion on the lack/problems of follow-up post-surgery, 129 and low-quality evidence, 132.

¹⁴⁵ Favale, 195-196.

¹⁴⁶ Favale, 198.

¹⁴⁷ West, 172.

When they are encouraged to use cross-sex hormones, does anyone tell them they will need to take the cross-sex hormones *for the rest of their lives*? Why? Grabowski writes

Further, these individuals remain at odds with their bodies' biochemistry as they will need to continue cross-sex hormonal therapy for the remainder of their lives.¹⁴⁸

Why? Because the body knows how it is supposed to be and it wants to be that. Evert states

One of the challenges of relying upon hormones to transform one's body is that it will always want to bend back to its original state.¹⁴⁹

Just as puberty blockers can destroy one's fertility, does anyone tell those seeking cross-sex hormones that the hormones will destroy one's fertility forever? This goes against the very origin of the word "gender." West writes

Much wisdom can be regained here simply by looking at the root of the word *gender*. It shares the same root as words like *generous*, *generate*, *genesis*, *genetics*, *genealogy*, and *progeny*. *Gen* means "to beget or give birth to." A person's *gen-der*, therefore, is based on the manner in which that person is designed to *gen-erate* new life, and that is determined by the kind of *gen-itals* he or she has.¹⁵⁰ " (West, 165).

If the purpose of gender is to generate new life, any medicines that destroy one's fertility go against the very purpose of one's gender. Where is the logic in cross-sex hormones?

Just as one would not prescribe appetite suppressants or liposuction for a person suffering from anorexia, it is a mistake to try to treat gender discordance by aggressive chemical and surgical overwriting of the person's body.¹⁵¹

Cross-sex hormones do not really treat the problem of their gender identity. They only serve to make one's body appear to conform to what they think their gender is.

Surgery

If one chooses to, there are surgical procedures that can change a person's genitals and breasts to make them appear to be of the opposite gender. Remember, I said above that every cell in the human body has a chromosome set that is XX or XY (female or male.) No surgery can change that. No surgery can give a person fully functioning reproductive organs (testicles or ovaries) of the opposite sex. (Surgeries are also done to change their voice and the shape of their face.)

There is a condition known as Body Integrity Dysphoria (BID) where a person has all their limbs but they think they do not. To make their body conform to the missing limb, they desire to have the limb cut off. We do not allow them to amputate the limb. We say it brings them harm. Yet, when a person identifies as the opposite gender, we allow them to have their genitals removed and an artificial genital of the opposite sex is "created" for them.

¹⁴⁸ Grabowski, 39.

¹⁴⁹ Evert, 120.

¹⁵⁰ West, 165.

¹⁵¹ Grabowski, 41.

Favale writes of one of the first attempts using surgery to change the appearance of one's gender.

In 1930, a Danish artist named Einar Wegener underwent the first of four surgeries in an attempt to change his sex. Wegener had been regularly dressing and presenting as a woman for several years, occasionally going by the name "Lili". Wegener was one of the first people to have what is now called sex reassignment surgery (or "gender confirmation" surgery). In the 1930's, this was a novel phenomenon, the procedures were entirely *experimental*.¹⁵²

Experimental...how did anyone think of such a surgery? The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Doctrine recently published a document concerning such surgeries. They write

A fundamental tenet of the Christian faith is that there is an order in the natural world that was designed by its Creator and that this created order is good (Gen 1:31; Ps 19:1ff.).¹⁵³

Are we playing God? There is a saying, "Just because we can do a thing does not mean we should do the thing." The USCCB Committee on Doctrine writes

Modern technology offers an ever-increasing range of means—chemical, surgical, genetic—for intervening in the functioning of the human body, as well as for modifying its appearance. These technological developments have provided the ability to cure many human maladies and promise to cure many more. This has been a great boon to humanity. Modern technology, however, produces possibilities not only for helpful interventions, but also for interventions that are injurious to the true flourishing of the human person. Careful moral discernment is needed to determine which possibilities should be realized and which should not, in order to promote the good of the human person. To do this discernment, it is necessary to employ criteria that respect the created order inscribed in our human nature.¹⁵⁴

I repeat an earlier quote

Every generation of Americans needs to know that freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.¹⁵⁵

The USCCB Committee on Doctrine speaks of the order we find in nature.

Pope Benedict XVI explained that the natural world has an "inbuilt order," a "grammar" that "sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation." Pope Francis has warned against a "technological paradigm" that treats the natural world as "something formless, completely open to manipulation."¹⁵⁶

For Jews and Christians there is a divine order in the way God created things that we should not seek to overcome. Even for the atheist who believes in evolution only, I would suggest that evolution and the theory of natural selection would say there is a reason why the human race

¹⁵² Favale, 85. My emphasis.

¹⁵³ USCCB Committee on Doctrine, 2.

¹⁵⁴ USCCB Committee on Doctrine, 1

¹⁵⁵ Pope John Paul II, "Homily of His Holiness."

¹⁵⁶ USCCB Committee on Doctrine, 2.

evolved as male and female. This should be respected. While an atheist might say that since there is no god, one is completely free to determine their own identity, I might say if there is no god, then there is no soul. There would be nothing more than the body. Therefore, the body is what it is.

Regarding surgery on the body, the USCCB Committee on Doctrine writes

There are essentially two scenarios recognized by the Church's moral tradition in which technological interventions on the human body may be morally justified: 1) when such interventions aim to repair a defect in the body; 2) when the sacrifice of a part of the body is necessary for the welfare of the whole body. These kinds of technological interventions respect the fundamental order and finality inherent in the human person. However, there are other technological interventions that aim neither to repair some defect in the body nor to sacrifice a part for the sake of the whole but, rather, aim to alter the fundamental order of the body. Such interventions do not respect the order and finality inscribed in the human person.¹⁵⁷

It may be our body but are we wise to mess with it?

Pope Pius XII stipulated three conditions that must be fulfilled for a medical intervention “that involves anatomical or functional mutilation” to be morally permissible: First, the retention or functioning of a particular organ in the organism as a whole causes serious damage to it or constitutes a threat. Second, this damage cannot be avoided, or at least appreciably diminished, otherwise than by the mutilation in question and the effectiveness of the mutilation is well assured. Finally, it can reasonably be expected that the negative effect, i.e., the mutilation and its consequences, will be compensated for by the positive effect: removal of the danger for the whole organism, lessening of suffering, etc.¹⁵⁸

Do puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and surgeries to change the genitals of a human person really help? If they do, then the person's mental health should improve. In some cases it does. However,

The rate of psychiatric hospitalization for postoperative transexuals was about three times the rate for the control groups, adjusted for previous psychiatric treatment.¹⁵⁹

Detransitioning

While Evert states that is generally accepted that 60% to 90% of those who transition are happy with the transition¹⁶⁰, the suicide rate shows that clearly not everyone is meant to attempt to transition their bodies from one gender to the other. To further support this, there are some people who “complete the transition” only to transition back to find happiness. Howell tells the story of a girl who was pushed to transition to be a man without first dealing with her known mental health

¹⁵⁷ USCCB Committee on Doctrine, 8.

¹⁵⁸ USCCB Committee on Doctrine, 12.

¹⁵⁹ Grabowski, 40, from Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 103 (emphasis in original).

¹⁶⁰ Evert, 140.

issues. She is now suing in court those who pushed her to transition. They told her it would fix her mental health issues. It didn't.¹⁶¹

Mental Health

It seems clear to me that any already diagnosed mental health issues should be dealt with before allowing anyone to transition. One has to be of sound mental health to be able to make such a transition.

Evert tells us

Dr. Lisa Littman found that more than 60 percent of them “had one or more diagnoses of a psychiatric disorder or neurodevelopmental disability preceding the onset of gender dysphoria...According to research of more than 1000 children and adolescents published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, psychological disorders were seven times higher among trans-believing youth *prior any sign of gender dysphoria*.¹⁶² (Evert, 152).

I do not mean to imply that gender confusion issues are really just mental health issues. The gender confusion issues may precede mental health issues. Even if the gender confusion issues began first the person may still benefit from proper counseling to help them work through their issues to properly identify and address their core problems.¹⁶³

I would invite you to consider the possibility that even if a person who is facing gender confusion issues has no apparent mental health issues, counseling may be appropriate to help them work through issues associated with transitioning. I do not agree with allowing them to transition. I am only saying that if you want to allow them to transition, counseling should be required as part of the process.

¹⁶¹ Howell, SueAnn, O.C.D.S., “North Carolina woman files lawsuit in wake of gender transition surgery as a teen.” July 20, 2023.

¹⁶² Evert, 152.

¹⁶³ See Coakley, 7.

How Do We Function Around LGBT People?

Conscientious Objection

Another very important question to consider is who provides these so-called treatments and sex change operations? Are we going to force all doctors to prescribe puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for anyone who wants them? What if it violates their beliefs? If you say yes, meaning they should be forced to, why? If the person who wants to transition has the right to do what they want, how come the doctor does not?

Then, are you going to force all doctors to perform sex change operations? Regardless of anyone's beliefs, is that wise? It seems to me that this would be a very specialized surgery. Besides the obvious plastic surgeons, these operations involve specialists in Urology and Gynecology. Are you going to force all doctors to perform these procedures? How many doctors are qualified to?

On the question of forcing compliance, we now move to the issues in schools today where students, teachers, and staff may be forced to comply with gender affirming policies.

Required Pro-LGBT Lessons In Schools

I have focused on the Catholic perspective on gender issues. As we look at these in the schools a current lawsuit in Maryland shows that this is not an issue just for Catholic families. Catholics are joined in a lawsuit in Montgomery County Maryland by Muslims and Ethiopian Orthodox parents.¹⁶⁴

Those who support modern gender ideology have a foothold in the schools. They have been able to have it taught to children in the youngest grades before they are old enough to even begin to understand questions of gender. Teachers and staff are told they have to call students by their preferred pronouns or selected names. The beliefs of the teachers and staff do not matter. There is no room for conscientious objectors.

There are two things that make this puzzling to me. I was always told a child does best when the parents are involved in their education (see my blog article, "Helping Our Children be Disciples" for an introduction to the parents' role in education¹⁶⁵). Yet, if a child wishes to change their gender, in some states the teachers are not allowed to tell the parents. Likewise, if a child is scheduled to go on a field trip, a parent needs to sign a permission slip but, again, they are not allowed to tell the parent if the child wants to change their gender. I do not see the logic here. Has relativism replaced logic too?

It is important that our schools include programs for the well-being of students struggling with gender issues. However, Evert states

¹⁶⁴ Arnold, Tyler, "Parents plan appeal as judge rules against opt-out right for LGBT curriculum in Maryland." August 25, 2023. Catholic News Agency. Online at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/255195/parents-plan-appeal-as-judge-rules-against-opt-out-right-for-lgbt-curriculum-in-maryland>.

¹⁶⁵ My blog article, "Helping Our Children be Disciples" can be found at <http://blog.renewaloffaith.org/blog/?p=7309>.

While programs to prevent harassment and discrimination against children who experience gender dysphoria are necessary, the programs typically serve as a Trojan horse for the deconstruction of any norms around sexual identity.¹⁶⁶

There need to be limits on these programs. Evert later continues

Indoctrinating classrooms of children into gender theory violates the privacy and natural development of the students. For students who aren't questioning their sexual identity, such programs introduce unnecessary confusion...To propose that the solution is as simple as professing an alternative gender identity and pursuing social and medical transition undermines and fails to appreciate the complexity of individual people struggling. In fact, many young children with gender dysphoria are not interested in transitioning, and to tell them that most people inevitably will misrepresents the research in this area.¹⁶⁷

For Anyone Who Interacts With a Person Who Identifies As Transgender

As it becomes more public and in greater numbers for people to identify as “transgender” those who disagree with modern gender ideology may find themselves at a loss as to what to do or say.

The first piece of advice that I would like to offer is Jesus' words in Mark 13:11

When they lead you away and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say. But say whatever will be given to you at that hour. For it will not be you who are speaking but the holy Spirit.

We must ask the Holy Spirit not just what to say but if the time has come to say it. Sri writes

While we have an obligation to share the truth with others, in some situations, it may be prudent *not* to bring up certain moral topics with a friend. The person might not be ready right now. More time might be needed to build up trust.¹⁶⁸

This is not an excuse to say nothing. It is the patience to wait if God tells us it is not time to say everything. Maybe we need to build trust first. Perhaps we need to help them come to faith in Jesus first.

We must also consider the immediate situation. For instance, if someone is immediately threatening violence, *it is not the time* to initiate a discussion on gender.

This being said, if God says it is time, then we must speak the truth. Otherwise, we risk breaking the Eighth Commandment against bearing false witness. As I mentioned above, Ezekiel 3:17-21

¹⁶⁶ Evert, 96-97.

¹⁶⁷ Evert, 97-98. Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education (for Educational Institutions), *Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*. Vatican City. 2019.

Available online at

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20190202_maschi_o-e-femmina_en.pdf/

¹⁶⁸ Sri, 157.

tells us that we are called to say what God asks us to say. After that, it is in the hands of the one we have offered the truth to.

We do not have to face these challenges alone. We can turn to God for help and the gifts of courage and counsel. Sammons reminds us that one of the common reasons people do not talk about their faith is fear of rejection.¹⁶⁹ When we feel that it is for someone more educated to do, Sammons reminds that the first person to deliver the news that Jesus had risen was Mary Magdalene, not one of the Twelve Apostles.¹⁷⁰

You never know who is going to listen. Sammons also shares the story of the woman who had had an abortion and was led back to the Catholic faith when Linda was willing to politely state that she did not approve of abortion.¹⁷¹ The only result that we can know for certain before we do something is that if we do or say nothing, nothing will change.

We also need to ask God to provide us with patience. As Wessman writes

Time is often required before positive results are witnessed.¹⁷²

I think of the bakeries and florists who demonstrated the courage to stand up in court for their right to not make *products promoting behavior* that violates their faith. I think of the patience they show as their cases move through the courts. And I thank God that some of them have won their cases for religious freedom.

Another very important thing to remember when speaking truth to someone who may be entering a lifestyle contrary to our faith is that offering the truth must come with compassion. Here are some of the key phrases Evert suggests to begin with.

- “You are not the church’s enemy.”¹⁷³
- “We understand that you didn’t choose this.”¹⁷⁴
- “But I’m willing to bet that you’re not trying to wage war against Catholicism. You’re more interested in living a peaceful life and becoming fully yourself.”¹⁷⁵
- “If you’re wondering what God thinks about all of this, know that the Church’s answer to your questions is not, “Repent and just pick up your cross!”¹⁷⁶
- “Because you deserve love, you also deserve the truth.”¹⁷⁷

For the remainder of this paper, I do not always offer definitive solutions. I offer questions that need solutions and I try to offer possibilities. It is going to require genuine dialogue and the grace of God to find solutions.

¹⁶⁹ Sammons, Eric, *The Old Evangelization: How to Spread the Faith Like Jesus Did*. El Cajon, CA: Catholics Answers Press. 2017. 23.

¹⁷⁰ Sammons, 22.

¹⁷¹ Sammons, 19-21.

¹⁷² Wessman, 221.

¹⁷³ Evert, 9.

¹⁷⁴ Evert, 9

¹⁷⁵ Evert, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Evert, 10.

¹⁷⁷ Evert, 11.

Pronouns/Name Change

One of the challenges in interacting with someone who identifies as transgender is the question of personal pronouns. Until my recent reading I thought this was “simply” a question of when to use “he” or “she.” That was difficult enough for those of us who do not agree with modern gender ideology. However, now they have created new pronouns. Evert lists “ae, per, xe, zie, sie, ey, ve, tey, and e”¹⁷⁸ as among the growing number of possibilities. I find this difficult to understand even if one accepts modern gender ideology. There is no way to know what pronoun to use when meeting a new person. Their solution is that you ask. With so many options, even when they tell us, how are we supposed to remember? Does it mean anything to call them by one of these new personal pronouns if we do not know what it means? Is the devil trying to confuse us?

When people begin to identify as a different gender, they may also choose to change their names. We often call people by nicknames but this is more than that. If they choose a name associated with their opposite gender and we agree to call them by that name, would it not seem to mean that we accept their new gender identity?

Evert says agreeing to call people by their preferred pronouns is false compassion. He proposes as a possible solution to agree on a gender-neutral nickname.¹⁷⁹ I see no other options. We need the Holy Spirit to help us here.

Sports Teams

Another question that has come to the forefront is the question of which sports team does a transgender person play on. Do they play on the team (male/female) that corresponds to the gender they claim to identify with or do they play on the team of the gender that their physical bodies reveal to them at birth?

Evert offers a list of the advantages of being born male in sports.¹⁸⁰ I wonder how, when sports ban steroids and other body-enhancing “treatments”, people undergoing transition using cross-sex hormones are allowed to play on any team. The best answer comes from a famous former Olympian and now transgender person.

...The NCAA defended Lia’s right to compete, while others, such as Olympian Caitlyn Jenner (formerly Bruce Jenner), argued that Thomas’ presence in the pool with women was unfair, would kill women’s sports, and is “not good for the trans community.”¹⁸¹

Which Bathroom?

Another difficult question that arises is which bathroom do they use. This issue comes up for the Catholic Church in the work of Catholic Charities. Payne discusses the challenges that will come with new regulations expected to be in effect soon that would require Catholic Charities to allow

¹⁷⁸ Evert, 178.

¹⁷⁹ Evert, 181.

¹⁸⁰ Evert, 188-190.

¹⁸¹ Evert, 186, from Fox News January 18, 2022.

transgender to use the bathroom for the gender they identify with. It would also require allowing transgender homeless people to stay in shelters for the gender they identify with.¹⁸²

On this question it is unfortunate that some people seem to assume all transgender people are sexual deviants out to molest others. This is not true. Others are concerned that people who are heterosexual but are indeed sexual deviants will use the right of transgender people to use the bathroom of the gender they identify with to gain access to victims of the opposite gender. The closest documented parallel to this would be male prisoners who claim to identify as females in order to be transferred to female prisons and then rape and impregnate female prisoners.¹⁸³ The one solution I can think of for new construction of public bathrooms is to build individual bathrooms rather than group bathrooms. This would be difficult to incorporate in existing public restrooms.

What question(s) does that leave us with? The one that comes to mind is perhaps the most difficult, the rights and responsibilities of parents with underage children as well as the interaction of parents with adult children who identify as transgender.

Parental Rights and Responsibilities

I've already mentioned about the discrepancy of requiring a permission slip from a parent for a school trip while prohibiting school personnel from telling parents if their child is dealing with gender dysphoria. We blame parents whose children became active shooters (admittedly they may have some blame here) but again hide their child's gender dysphoria from them. Can we make sense of this? *Nothing is impossible for God*. Again, we need genuine dialogue but this is difficult, if not impossible when we are expected to simply accept whatever one claims as their gender identity.

Parents are now sometimes told that if their children want to transition they must let/support them or they will commit suicide. Children are taught on the internet to say they will kill themselves if they don't transition. There are youth who really do commit suicide. It is a terrible thing to encourage a child to use the threat of suicide as a weapon.

Archbishop Coakley offers the following advice to parents whose children have to come to them expressing gender dysphoria.

I encourage parents to become curious and to ask gently about what their child is experiencing. The idea isn't to interrogate but to better understand. Questions like: In what way do you feel like [the opposite gender/both genders/neither gender]? When is the earliest/first time you remember feeling this way? Are there situations where that desire feels stronger? Are there situations where the pain of the struggle lessens? How does your faith influence your thinking on this topic? Are you considering your faith in relation to this topic? These questions can start

¹⁸² Payne, Daniel, "Catholic bishops take issue with Biden administration's proposed LGBT discrimination rules." September 6, 2023. Catholic News Agency. Online at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/255292/catholic-bishops-take-issue-with-biden-administration-s-proposed-lgbt-discrimination-rules>.

¹⁸³ Evert, 192-193.

important conversations that help children and young people better understand themselves as well as ***help them feel heard, known, and loved.***¹⁸⁴

In chapter seventeen of his book, *Male, Female, Other*, Evert likewise offers advice to parents whose children come to them with gender dysphoria. Here are a few highlights.

- “Express gratitude that she shared this information with you.”¹⁸⁵
- “Be empathetic. Don’t try to disprove her feelings.”¹⁸⁶
- Ask “Can you tell me more about this? I want to understand.”¹⁸⁷
- “Remind her that she is loved.”¹⁸⁸
- “Be patient. The process of accompanying your child on this journey is more of a marathon than a sprint.”¹⁸⁹

Regarding parental rights, there is hope. Some states, most recently Virginia, are enforcing parental rights¹⁹⁰, allowing parents to fulfill their duty to provide a good education in human sexuality for their children.¹⁹¹ We should also thank teachers like those in California who are fighting for parents’ rights to know about their children’s “gender status.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁴ Coakley, 6. My emphasis.

¹⁸⁵ Evert, 197.

¹⁸⁶ Evert, 198..

¹⁸⁷ Evert, 198.

¹⁸⁸ Evert, 199.

¹⁸⁹ Evert, 205.

¹⁹⁰ Payne, “Virginia Bishops”.

¹⁹¹ Elliot, 12.

¹⁹² Arnold, Tyler, “California teachers sue over policy that forces them to hide students’ gender preference.” May 2, 2023. Catholic News Agency. Online at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/254221/calif-teachers-sue-over-policy-forcing-them-hide-students-gender-preferences-from-parents>.

Conclusion

Here is where I wish I could write a stellar conclusion that answers all the questions and solves all the problems. I cannot. I do not believe that I have all the answers but I hope this article has provided you with helpful information and helps people to be able to engage in genuine dialogue. Most importantly, I hope it helps those who struggle with gender confusion themselves to understand our Catholic teaching. I pray it helps those with family members who struggle with gender confusion to offer them truth ***and*** compassion. I hope it helps you find a way to build bridges to those around you. We can be a light in the darkness if we let the light of Christ shine through us. Remember, even if you feel hated by them, they need love.

Regarding those who think anyone who objects to modern gender ideology should remain silent, they might want to use the phrase “live and let live.” I trust they would not say that if someone witnesses abuse or a crime, that they should remain silent. As Christians, we should not remain silent about gender ideology.

In my paper, “Towards Dignity and Truth: Compassionate Dialogue on Homosexuality,” I offered some questions to ask when we are discerning if God is calling us to speak up or if we are discerning if we can continue a friendship with someone living a homosexual lifestyle. I think the questions are worth repeating here.

1. Do you know what you believe about God’s teaching on sexuality?
2. Do they know what you believe about sexuality?
3. Are you being honest with them?
4. If you keep silent, (especially if you have not spoken up before), how do they interpret your silence? Remember, silence can often be interpreted as agreement or acceptance.
5. Are you helping them be the best version of themselves as God sees them? Are they helping you be the best version of yourself in God’s eyes? ¹⁹³

When you feel God is asking you to speak up, consider the following:

- Pray before you speak
- Name calling and bashing does not help.
- Make sure everything you say is spoken with compassion, love, and truth
- Listen to what they have to say, not to give in, but to seek understanding while holding on to the truth.
- Pray every day for the person you know who struggles with gender confusion and pray for all who do.
- When you vote, ask what do the candidates think about gender or gender issues?

Lastly, we must never forget the Eucharist as the medicine of mercy. Simply feeling transgender is not a sin. The Eucharist can be a great source of strength for those who know it to be the Real Presence of Jesus.

¹⁹³ Tunnickliff, “Homosexuality”, 15.

I think the best way I can end is with prayer.

Heavenly Father,
You created us male and female
but there are many who struggle with what that means.
We struggle to share your truth with them.
We ask you to give us
 grace, courage, understanding, and compassion
 that we may speak your truth.
We ask to bestow your grace
 upon all those who struggle with confusion about who they are.
We entrust them to your care
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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