



# THE BODY REVEALS THE PERSON

A CATHOLIC RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF GENDER IDEOLOGY

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**Just as a good mother loves her children wholeheartedly, so too, our mother the Church loves her children with all her heart.**

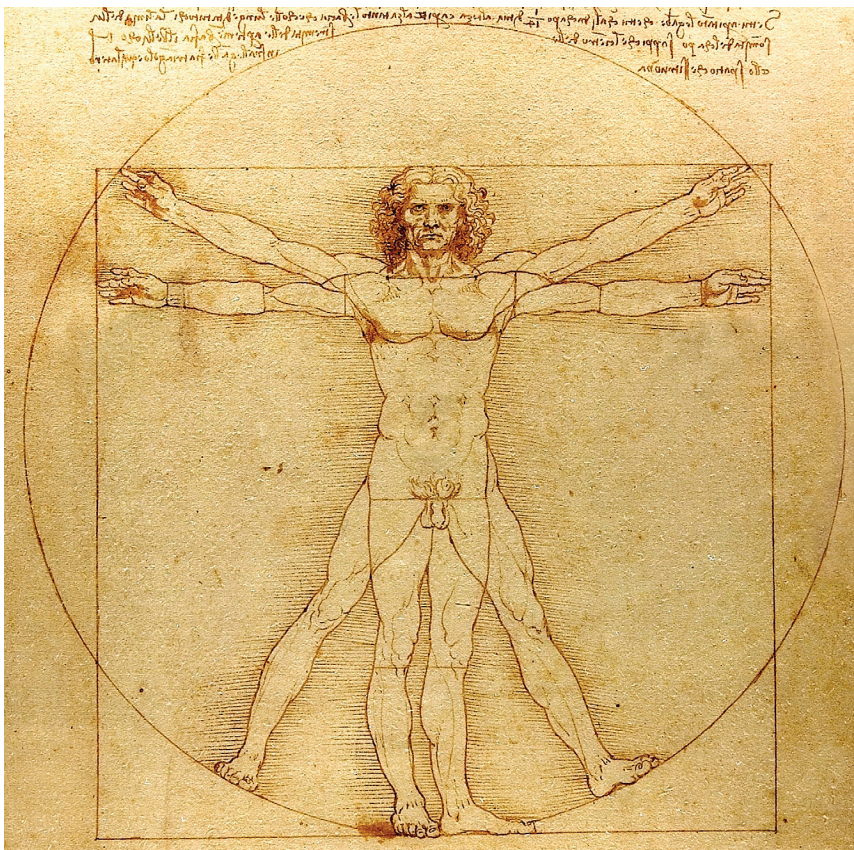
**F**or some time, faithful Catholics here in the Diocese of Toledo and elsewhere, prompted by the uncertainties of our times, have expressed their concerns about matters pertaining to gender. This Response is intended to address some of those concerns. It is presented not only to those with official roles in the Church who need guidance to carry out their responsibilities—priests, deacons, religious, teachers, catechists—but to all the Catholic faithful. First and foremost, I wish to express my special pastoral concern for those who suffer from gender confusion. I offer to you, your families and friends, and to all who are concerned for your welfare, the Church’s guidance on the many vexing questions that arise in this difficult area. Although the guidance that follows is meant to clarify

important theological points about the nature of gender, it is intended primarily as pastoral help from the heart of the Church, fundamental for our understanding of and response to the challenges of gender ideology. Just as a good mother loves her children wholeheartedly, so too, our mother the Church loves her children with all her heart. She speaks words of comfort to them and tries to relieve as much as possible their heavy burdens. But her guidance would not be truly loving if she failed to speak with utmost honesty, even when that guidance runs contrary to some of the assumptions of our contemporary culture or conflicts with feelings experienced by some who struggle with issues of gender. And so, I humbly ask your sincere openness as I speak to you heart to heart.

#### WHAT IS GENDER IDEOLOGY?

Gender ideology is a novel belief system about the human person based on the erroneous premise that each person has a “gender identity” that he or she self-determines according to feelings, regardless of the reality of the person’s male or female body.<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis had warned against gender ideology, which “promotes ‘a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female,’ in which ‘human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time.’”<sup>2</sup>

Proponents of gender ideology freely acknowledge that this belief system rejects the idea that human nature is divided into two and only two sexes, male and female, an idea



they refer to pejoratively as the “male/female binary system” of human sexuality. Indeed, this ideology regards “the male/female binary system” and “heteronormative concepts” of sexual orientation as “the origin of most injustice, including discrimination.”<sup>3</sup>

To overcome these supposed root problems, gender ideology claims that the “autonomy” of individuals, including children, gives them the right to access medical and surgical interventions to “affirm” their asserted gender identity and to achieve personal “embodiment goals.”<sup>4</sup> These technological interventions “are intended to transform the body so as to make it take on as much as possible the form of the opposite sex,”<sup>5</sup> but this “transformation” does not just alter the body’s appearance, but also impairs, often irreparably, healthy natural functions.

## THE IMPACT OF GENDER IDEOLOGY ON CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Across the United States—and globally—gender ideology has had a far-reaching impact, driving changes in culture, language, law, education, healthcare, social norms, and relationships. Many of our institutions, including governments, corporations, schools, and the media have endorsed the tenets of gender ideology, creating new challenges for Catholics and other religious believers. They risk job loss, social ostracism, and being “canceled” for defending the truths inscribed in human nature and taught in divine revelation that humans exist as male and female, that this is part of God’s will for human flourishing, and that no belief or intervention on our part can change these realities.

As gender ideology attempts to reshape the culture, it exerts a particularly powerful influence on the self-perceptions and beliefs of children, adolescents, and young adults, especially about human identity, marriage, and sexuality. Many young people appear to believe that the body does not adequately express “the real *me*,” and that identity is determined instead by feelings or self-perceptions, regardless

of the body. This is the consistent message they hear from “gender-affirming” teachers, counselors, and peers, and on social media. But the message they need to hear is “You are not born into the wrong body. You were born into the wrong culture...it is the culture that needs to be reconstructed, not you.”<sup>6</sup>

Social media is an especially powerful influence upon young people today. According to Pew research, 95% of teens have access to a smartphone, and the majority of teens visit YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat daily, with nearly half of all teens (46%) admitting they are on the internet “almost constantly.”<sup>7</sup> Pornography is rampant across all platforms, exposing children at ever younger ages to distorted and hypersexualized images of both females and males, to sexual violence, and to glamorized stories of young people who have ‘courageously’ embraced their “transgender” identity.<sup>8</sup> Even the design of the platforms themselves reinforces the belief that their dignity is dependent upon peer affirmation (e.g., “likes,” “follows,” etc.).

Much social media content is especially damaging to young people’s self-understanding and morals, inundating them with messages that celebrate “LGBTQ” identification, while denigrating traditional morality and biblical beliefs. YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, and (especially) TikTok promote a constant stream of transgender-related images and stories that normalize and celebrate the experiences of those who “come out” as “trans,” begin “cross-sex hormones,” or undergo “gender transition” surgeries (e.g., double mastectomies or genital reconstruction). Trans-identified social media influencers share their own “transgender” journeys, encouraging vulnerable teens to believe they too are “transgender” and to deceive parents who do not support “transition.” Video games, anime, interactive websites, and television/videos also encourage children and teens to “try out” new “gender identities.”

The net effect of the gender ideology permeating culture and social media is to



convince many people—especially youth—that feelings and desires dictate the reality of human identity. All too often, people absorb the message that if they are in pain and don't fit in, or if they experience distress about their self-image, their body, or their sexuality, then they must be gay or lesbian or bisexual or “transgender,” and that “coming out” and/or “transitioning” will resolve their unhappiness.

Until recently, the number of people experiencing identity-related distress or identifying as “transgender” was tiny—a fraction of a fraction of a percent. Today, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one in four American teens self-identify as “LGBTQ,”<sup>9</sup> and a recent study of urban high school students found that 9.2% self-identify as “transgender or gender-diverse.”<sup>10</sup>

## TRANSGENDERISM AND GENDER DYSPHORIA

A person who identifies as “transgender,” “non-binary” (a feeling of being neither male nor female), or something else *rejects* his or her given sexual identity as male or female.<sup>11</sup> This person might experience identity or body-related distress, expressed as “being born in the wrong body” or feelings of “gender dysphoria.” The American Psychiatric Association’s (APA’s) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-5-TR lists “gender dysphoria” as a mental health condition reflecting clinical distress arising from the incongruence of the person’s perceived “gender identity” and the reality of the person’s sex.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note, however, that not all persons who assert a “transgender” identity experience this distress. According to the APA’s diagnostic criteria, only those who experience distress are said to suffer from a mental disorder. Their feelings of incongruence between their biological sex and their “gender identity” are not themselves considered disordered. This is obviously problematic since according to the APA’s criteria, only these people’s distress

needs to be treated and not their powerful desires to “transition” to another sex.

Persons who identify as “transgender,” whether or not they are diagnosed with “gender dysphoria,” typically assert a chosen identity, including a new name and preferred pronouns, and ask others to publicly validate their chosen identity. They often seek to change their appearance cosmetically (new hairstyle, clothing, and mannerisms). Some transgender-identified individuals use special garments or tape to flatten or minimize the appearance of female breasts or male genitals. These techniques, called “tucking” or “binding,” can harm the body, particularly over time. Many use medical or surgical interventions to stop the natural, healthy functioning of the body (e.g., suppressing puberty, menses, and genital/reproductive development) and even to remove or reconstruct genitals or reproductive organs.<sup>13</sup> These are not theoretical concerns. The number of “transgender” related surgeries in the U.S. tripled from 2016–2020, and included 3,678 irreversible “transgender” surgeries on adolescents aged 12 to 18.<sup>14</sup>

## THE CHURCH’S “UNITIVE” ANTHROPOLOGY—BODY AND SOUL TRULY ONE

To understand why efforts to reject or alter one’s biological sex are so harmful, we must properly understand the human person. God’s revelation affirms that human beings are created in the image of God, and as such, they are *personal*, *bodily*, and *sexually differentiated* (i.e., male and female). Another way to say this is that human beings, both male and female, are personal, integrated unities of body and soul. This means that *both the body and the soul have personal value*.

This can be called the *unitive* view of the human person, or unitive anthropology, and it undergirds not only the Church’s defense of human life, but also her teaching on marriage and sexual morality, including then Pope Francis’s emphatic moral conclusion that “all

attempts to obscure reference to the ineliminable sexual difference between man and woman are to be rejected.”<sup>15</sup> As we shall see, those who recognize that the body is integral to the person can—unlike proponents of gender ideology—explain quite coherently how a person can know that he or she is male or female, a man or a woman. Those who embrace a unitive anthropology affirm that *the body reveals the person to be a man or a woman*. Let’s consider this anthropology more closely.

According to this unitive anthropology, the body is not a mere tool or instrument of the person, nor is it other than the person. Rather, both body and soul are integral to the very constitution of the person. The body animated by the soul is a living human being. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it:

*The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the “form” of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.*<sup>16</sup>

Unless the body is animated by the soul, it cannot be a living human body, but without the body, the person cannot be complete. When death separates the body from the soul, the person suffers a devastating loss. Far from being liberated, as some Greek philosophers believed, the person loses part of himself or herself that is essential for living a fully human life.

The Church’s recognition of the intrinsic and personal goodness of bodily life, which death destroys, explains why she insists that human life be respected from conception to natural death. It also explains why Christian hope is centered on sharing in Christ’s bodily resurrection. The *Catechism* beautifully expounds these points:



The human body shares in the dignity of “the image of God”: it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit:

*Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.*<sup>17</sup>

**“both body and soul are integral to the very constitution of the person”**





Everyday language captures the truth that, strictly speaking, people do not *have* bodies, but rather, *are* bodies. A child who falls off a bicycle does not say, “I hurt my *body*,” but “I hurt *myself*.” A man who is shoved by someone does not object, “Why did you shove my *body*?” but “Why did you shove *me*?” A woman who is raped is not concerned that her *property* was violated, but that *she* was violated.

### THE SPOUSAL MEANING OF THE BODY

The human body in its sexed nature—in its maleness and femaleness—is the visible and tangible revelation of the whole human person, of the unified body-soul reality made in God’s image.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, because body and soul are not two natures but form a single human nature, the body necessarily reveals the *person* as a boy or a girl, a man or a woman. God did not add the body after creating the soul; rather, as Genesis 1:27 tells us, in creating Man, “male and female he made them.”

After bringing each part of His creation into existence, God “saw that it was good” (Gen

1:3, 9, 12, 18, 21, 24). But he sees that His whole creation is “very good” (Gen 1:31) only after he makes man and woman in His own image and tells them, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:27–28). This indicates both the equal dignity of man and woman and the personal and exalted goodness of their complementary bodily selves.

It is also worth reflecting on the words, “It is not good that the man should

be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen 2:18). None of the lower creatures God brings to the man proves to be a fit helper; only when God brings him the woman, who was created from His very body, does the man recognize a person. Beholding the woman, he sees someone of equal dignity with him whose bodily differentiation from him enables him to be completed in His very person. The man cries out with joy: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:23).

The passage then draws a conclusion: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). *Clinging* conveys the idea that what is at stake is not just a physical act, but an act with an important personal and social meaning. In the very next verse, we learn that “the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” These

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verses reveal what Pope Saint John Paul II calls the spousal meaning of the body.<sup>19</sup> They reveal that the human body is good and has personal value, that male and female bodies have meaning in relation to each other because of their complementarity, and that the man and woman are capable of a faithful, intimate, and one-flesh—i.e., bodily—sharing of life.

Far from being mere things that can be used in whatever way people happen to mutually agree upon, bodies have inherent meaning. The man's body is a sign of the gift of himself to the woman, and vice versa. The Church's recognition of the personal and spousal meaning of the body underlies her entire teaching on sexual morality. That teaching insists that both the unitive dimension of human sexuality, by which man and woman enjoy personal union as one flesh, and the procreative dimension, by which that union, with God's help, brings new persons into being, are of personal significance. Indeed, the personal and spousal meaning of the body has transcendent significance, for the fruitful marriage between a man and a woman is an icon of the Trinity.<sup>20</sup>

This recognition of the inherent goodness of the body and its personal and spousal meaning is the basis of the Church's teaching about the imperative of respecting and caring for one's body as well as about the grave wrongness of rejecting one's sex or trying to alter primary or secondary sex characteristics to appear to change the body's sexed nature.

### **DUALISM: THE VIEW OF THE HUMAN PERSON BEHIND GENDER IDEOLOGY**

In contrast to the unitive anthropology that underlies Catholic teaching about the person and the personal significance of being male or female, gender ideology presupposes a view of the human person known as *dualism*. The *dualist* anthropology denies the personal value of the human body, regards it as mere material for the person to manipulate, and fails to recognize the personal significance of the body's sexed nature.

Dualists believe that human beings are not

an integrated unity of body and soul, but rather are divided between a material body and a non-material inner self (a mind, spirit, or consciousness).<sup>21</sup> Only the inner self is identified with the person. The body and all that goes with it—flesh, blood, brain—are subpersonal, instrumental to the purposes of the inner self. As a canvas is to an artist or a ship to its captain, so the body is to the person, a kind of medium on which the person expresses his or her creativity, or vessel over which the person exercises control. According to this view the body does not have personal value, does not reveal the person.

The dualist understanding of the human person dominant in contemporary culture is by no means new; we find roots of this view at least as far back as Plato. What we are witnessing is the extension to the transgender movement of the dualism implicit in secularist attitudes about the ethics of human life and sexuality. What is new, however, is the adoption of technology to attempt to radically reconfigure the human body in service of this dualism.

### **DUALISM AND THE ETHICS OF HUMAN LIFE AND SEXUALITY**

It is not difficult to see how the dualist anthropology can be used to justify offenses against life—for example, abortion and euthanasia. People who deny the inherent personal value of the body easily assume that human beings who are not yet capable of certain human activities are not yet persons with a right to life. According to this reasoning, an untimely pregnancy can reasonably be “terminated,” and some have even used this reasoning to justify infanticide.

So too, if one thinks the body is good not in itself but only insofar as it enables one to participate in other humanly good activities—such as learning new things, enjoying conversations with friends, and playing a musical instrument—one easily assumes that it is merciful to end the life deliberately of people incapable of participating in those

activities. If, for instance, grandma is no longer capable of enjoying human goods other than bodily life itself, those responsible for her care may conclude that she is better off dead, and that it would be an act of compassion to arrange for her death by, say, lethal injection or simply depriving her of nutrition. Killing her would not be understood as tearing apart an integrated unity of body and soul—as destroying grandma. Rather, killing her would be understood as setting her soul free. It is important to notice, however, that if death is regarded as a liberation from the body, then the prospect of rising bodily from the dead—the Christian doctrine of resurrection—can only be regarded as a burden. This fact makes it especially clear how anti-Christian the dualist anthropology really is.

The dualist view of the human person is also influential in cultural ideas on sexual morality. If the body is not the person, not the self, but an instrument of the self, then bodily sexual activities are not meaningful in themselves. They are not personal, but instrumental: useful for achieving other things—pleasure, tension reduction, preferential treatment—but not inherently significant. Because dualists regard the body as subpersonal, they do not recognize the spousal meaning of the body. Dualists do not evaluate the morality of sexual acts according to whether they are conducive to realizing spousal one-flesh union open to life. Quite the contrary. They assume that non-marital sexual activity—fornication, homosexual acts, solitary acts, and even acts between more than two people—can be morally good. Indeed, their shared assumption that the body lacks personal value leaves them no principled way to deny the moral goodness of any sexual act consenting adults may wish to engage in. This view stands in stark contrast to Pope Saint John Paul II's affirmation that "a person's rightful due is to be treated as an object of love, not as an object for use."<sup>22</sup>

## DUALISM AND EFFORTS TO "TRANSITION"

Those who defend efforts to "change" one's sex—to "transition" from male to female or vice versa—share a dualistic understanding of the human person. They presume that the body is raw material to use—if necessary, to radically alter or even, in part, destroy—in the creation of one's "self-identity." This depersonalized view of the body is especially illustrated in the common LGBTQ expression "sex assigned at birth," which suggests that *male* and *female* are arbitrary labels given by a doctor, rather than facts of human identity. The stunning illogic at the heart of this ideology is plain: subjective feelings are taken as sure indicators of objective truth about personal identity, while the objective biological fact of my sexed nature—"I am *male* or I am *female*"—is taken as merely an arbitrary label.

To hold that identity is determined apart from a person's bodily reality, and can even contradict that reality, plainly implies that one regards the body as subpersonal. How then can a person who is experiencing "transgender" feelings know whether he or she is a boy or a girl, a man or a woman? People who support "transitioning" can only insist that those who experience feelings of incongruity between their bodies and themselves are "in" the wrong body. But is it really possible for a biological male to know what it feels like to be a woman, or for a biological female to know what it feels like to be a man?

When people who reject their sexual identity are asked how they know their biological sex does not match who they truly are, they often answer by appealing to strong feelings. A biological male might say, for example, that he never felt comfortable playing with trucks or doing boyish things; he was easily hurt in relationships and frequently felt alienated from other boys; that even as a child he felt strong desires to dress, play, and act like a girl. A biological female might say she's always felt more comfortable with males; didn't



feel sexually attracted to men; felt terribly uncomfortable in her female skin; and didn't enjoy stereotypical female pursuits. But feeling a strong preference for traditionally female or male pursuits does not define what it means actually to *be* a woman or a man. In fact, there is significant overlap among men and women when it comes to interests and preferences, even if our culture tends to associate these interests or preferences with one sex or the other.<sup>23</sup>

Those who regard the body as subpersonal, a mere thing to be used, are unable to offer a coherent answer to the question of how a person who experiences distress about his or her identity as male or female, or indeed how any person can know whether he or she is a boy or a girl, a man or a woman. The only reliable indicator is the body, which they reject in favor of feelings. Yet feelings are inevitably subject to change.

## CONCUPISCENCE OBSCURES THE BODY'S SPOUSAL MEANING

Underlying the dualist tendency to view the body as instrumental to the good of the inner self—indeed, underlying all errors and conflicts concerning human identity—is the theological truth that human nature, even after baptism, is weakened, burdened with an inclination to error and sin called concupiscence.<sup>24</sup> Thus, all of us, not only dualists, can struggle with questions and internal doubts related to our true identities. We frequently do not feel like human nature is “very good,” as God proclaimed of all His creation after the sixth day was complete (Gen 1:31). We sometimes, perhaps often, feel doubtful that nothing, including life, death, the future, or anything else in all creation, can separate us from Jesus' love (Rom 8:38-39).

But among these errors to which concupiscence inclines us, arguably the greatest is the radical denial, widespread in today's gender ideology, that the body reveals one's fundamental identity as male or female. When the man and the woman lived in original innocence, their love was unclouded by sin and they

were able to be naked in each other's presence without shame. But after they sin—after they turned away from their loving God by choosing to do their will rather than His—shame enters their relationship. They are no longer attached to the Father, but to the world, and as a result, they experience shame over their nakedness: “It was then that ‘the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked’” (Gen 3:7).

Pope Saint John Paul II explains that their shame “reveals a specific difficulty in sensing the human essentiality of one's own body.”<sup>25</sup> He means that humans after the fall find it easy to depersonalize the body, to treat it as an object. This is evident in the temptation people experience to use their own bodies and those of others for their own sexual pleasure and without regard for the person. And it is especially evident in the tendency of the new gender ideology to view the body as malleable to human manipulation in the service of one's inner feelings.

The spousal meaning of the body is of crucial importance for the Church's mission of evangelization and catechesis. Bishop Michael Burbidge perceptively writes:

*So much of our faith rests on the natural truths of the human person, the body/soul unity, and the complementarity of man and woman. Jesus our Redeemer, the Son of God, assumes the body/soul unity of our human nature, sacrifices Himself and nourishes us by His Body, and is worshipped as the Bridegroom of the Church. The rejection of core natural truths regarding our humanity damages the “template” that God uses to reveal Himself to us and to manifest His salvific plan for us.*<sup>26</sup>

When we misconstrue the truth of the human person, the consequences for human good, in this world and the next, can be nothing short of catastrophic; for we then also misconstrue God's will for human flourishing, which undermines our ability rightly to love God, our neighbor, and ourselves.

## PEOPLE IN PAIN

Those who experience confusion about their sexual identities may suffer greatly. Their crosses may feel unendurably heavy. As Christians, we are called to be like Simon of Cyrene and help them bear their crosses. We should listen to their stories, be compassionate when they speak about confused feelings and body related-distress, offer them help when we can, and assure them of God's personal love for them.

They often find it difficult to function well at school or at work, in social situations, and in other areas of life, and these difficulties can lead to school dropout, unemployment, and serious relationship problems. Children and adolescents who are diagnosed with "gender dysphoria" are likely to experience pre-existing mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, and have experienced high rates of "adverse childhood events," such as the loss of a beloved family member, physical or sexual abuse, and other traumatic events. They are more likely to be on the autism spectrum, to have engaged in self-harm or suicidal behaviors, to experience anorexia or body image problems, or to have experienced serious family dysfunction or parental mental illness.<sup>27</sup>

Families too can be profoundly affected by their loved one's gender confusion. Parents who hear their son, for example, announce that he is a girl trapped in a boy's body and intends to undertake hormonal or surgical measures to alter his body to conform to his "gender" may suffer terribly. Many parents are concerned that their children are being indoctrinated with gender ideology at school; indeed, in many public school districts parents are not informed by the school that their child has been identifying in a way that contradicts his or her biological sex. Parents may fear that if they do not support their child's gender preferences or body-altering decisions—if they are not "gender affirming"—they may



alienate their child; they may even be told that if they do not affirm their child's confused gender ideas their child may be driven to despair and suicide.<sup>28</sup> Parents and families thus also need our understanding and support.

## ARE FEELINGS A RELIABLE INDICATOR OF ONE'S IDENTITY?

Although we should be sensitive to people's feelings, it would be a mistake to view people's feelings about their bodies as reliable indicators of what is true or to let those feelings dictate the therapeutic response. Identity or body-related distress is painful, but there is no scientific basis for treating as true a person's feelings of being "born in the wrong body." Sex is determined at conception, observed in utero or at birth, and cannot be changed. A person's sex marks every cell of the person's body—up to 30 trillion cells.<sup>29</sup> Every person is either male or female, and this fact never changes, despite an individual's conflicting feelings or experiences. It is telling

**Sex is determined at conception, observed in utero or at birth, and cannot be changed.**



that gender clinics never promise to “change” a person’s sex, because that is impossible. Instead, they describe interventions that attempt to “masculinize” or “feminize” the body in ways contrary to the person’s given sexual identity as male or female.<sup>30</sup> These interventions, which attempt to subvert nature itself, arise from the fallacious belief that “human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time.”<sup>31</sup>

Good medicine recognizes the difference between empathy and appropriately acknowledging a person’s feelings, on the one hand, and, on the other, allowing a person’s feelings to dictate medical care, contrary to the objective truth of his or her situation. For example, people suffering from anorexia nervosa *feel* very strongly that they are overweight even when their body weight is abnormally, and even dangerously, low. Clinicians realize that the proper response is to help the patient see that such feelings must be resisted and, insofar as possible, changed (through psychotherapy, medication, nutrition education, healthful exercise, etc.) because the feelings do not reflect reality. It would be harmful to the patient’s wellbeing for clinicians to “affirm” anorexic feelings or desires as good, or to permit those feelings to determine the course of medical interventions.

Similarly, people who suffer from body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) “can’t stop thinking about one or more perceived defects or flaws” in their physical appearance and, even though the flaw “appears minor or can’t be seen by others,” the person may seek repeated cosmetic surgery to “fix” the perceived flaw.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, a person with body integrity identity disorder (BIID) *feels* “the desire to acquire a physical disability and an associated sense of incompleteness at being able-bodied” and may desire amputation of perfectly healthy limbs.<sup>33</sup> Responsible medical personnel will not accommodate these feelings, but instead help the patient resist them, recognizing that repeated cosmetic surgery or amputating

healthy limbs will harm the patient.

Those who support taking steps to “transition” are unable to explain why we should think that although the patient’s feelings about his or her body are unreliable in cases of anorexia, BDD, and BIID, they are reliable when a patient feels like he or she was born in the wrong body and needs to alter his or her primary or secondary sex characteristics.

More recently, activists have begun to make the more radical claim that people have the right to adopt whatever “identity” they happen to desire and have no obligation to justify their choice.<sup>34</sup> This is not only incompatible with the reality of the sexed body, but also is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of Creation. As Pope Francis taught:

*It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality. Let us not fall into the sin of trying to replace the Creator. We are creatures, and not omnipotent. Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created.*<sup>35</sup>

## **RISKS AND HARMS OF EFFORTS TO “TRANSITION”**

The pain of people who experience confusion or distress about their identity, or even disassociation from their bodies, has a variety of causes, including experiences of emotional trauma, bullying, and rejection by peers and family members. These, in turn, can engender feelings of inadequacy and self-consciousness in social settings, and exacerbate distress about various body image issues. Compounding the suffering of these young persons is the brutal nature of the interventions. These futile efforts to change a person’s sexual identity can do no more than offer cosmetic changes. They

cannot achieve the desired result of enabling a person to “become” some other identity. Those who promote these procedures fail to demonstrate that they resolve distress; indeed, the interventions cause real and lasting harm, and we must protect vulnerable young men and women from being pushed into them.

The technological interventions carried out under the label of “gender-affirming care” inevitably constitute mutilation insofar as they attempt to remove or reconfigure bodily organs that are perfectly healthy. Of course, we should not, nor even can we judge the moral culpability of those who undergo these procedures. But actions contrary to the moral law, even in cases when culpability is mitigated, result in great harm to the agent. There is no clearer illustration of this than when young people who, confused by their feelings and fallacious ideas about sex and gender, are misled by peers, teachers, and medical professionals into believing they can change their bodies to match the opposite sex, and who are assisted to take steps—sometimes irreversible, but always futile—to bring this about. Indeed, an increasing number of people have come to regret profoundly their decision to attempt to change their sex and badly desire to “detransition.” They wish to undo the harm they have done to themselves through the use of hormone blockers, and they stand as tragic witnesses against the horror of permanent mutilation wrought by “transgender surgeries.”<sup>36</sup>

Nor is there evidence that these interventions resolve the risk of suicide. As one study explained, “Although there is no doubt that children and young people suffering gender dysphoria are an extremely vulnerable group deserving of our support and care, the oft-quoted suicide statistics are from surveys which are not robust and there is no evidence that transition is a ‘cure.’”<sup>37</sup> In fact, increasingly young men and women who have detransitioned admit that their dysphoria began or became worse only after they decided they were “trans” and began to obsess about “passing” as

the opposite sex.<sup>38</sup> Many had serious pre-existing conditions or co-morbidities that caused distress and suffering even aside from distress about their bodies. In fact these detransitioners realize that they needed psychotherapy and instead were offered medically assisted self-harm.

For these reasons, several European countries have backed away from models of care that push harmful medical and surgical interventions on young persons who are distressed about their bodies. These countries, including Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the UK, recognize the long-term harm from medical and surgical treatments designed to alter the body’s sex characteristics, and note that the efficacy of these treatments are based on weak evidence.<sup>39</sup> Instead, these countries prioritize psychotherapy for young persons in order to address their pre-existing conditions adequately. Similarly, efforts are ongoing in this country to institute statewide protection for young persons so that they cannot be harmed by these destructive treatments. Such efforts should not be reduced to politics but should be supported by persons of all political backgrounds.

## **MOUNTING SOCIAL PRESSURE TO ENDORSE GENDER IDEOLOGY**

Many people, influenced by gender ideology, assume that showing authentic love and support for those who experience gender confusion means approving of a person’s identifying in ways that contradict his or her biological sex, and even endorsing and helping facilitate a person’s inevitably vain attempts to try to change his or her sex.

Indeed, that attitude tends more and more to be expected of people. It is increasingly the case that anyone who disagrees with the new gender ideologies risks being called homophobic or transphobic or being dismissed as a “hater.” There is mounting social pressure, evident in the mainstream media, social media, and even in the communication require-

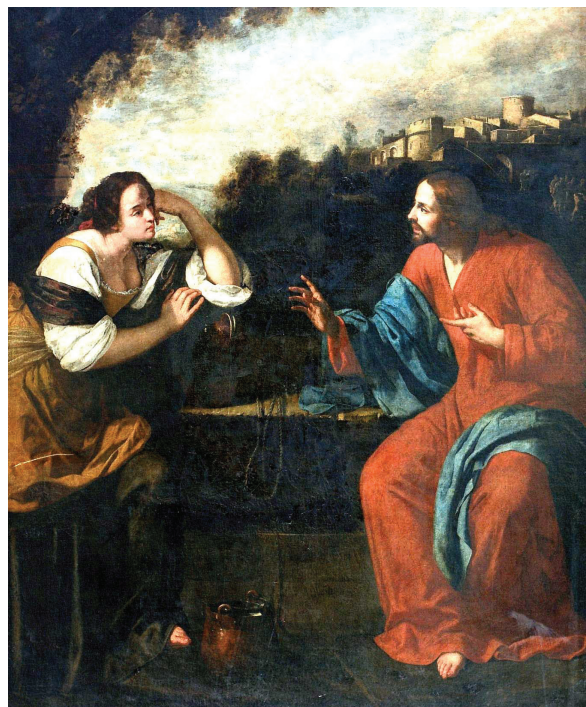


ments of schools and workplaces, to accommodate these views. People are expected to do so not only by not speaking up against them, but also by using language—such as pronouns—that conforms to people’s chosen gender identity even when this contradicts the truth of their biological identity.

Yet the personal and spousal meaning of the body make it clear that this agenda must be resisted.<sup>40</sup> We should, for example, even at the cost of considerable sacrifice, avoid using feminine pronouns to refer to a biological male who identifies as a woman, and using masculine pronouns to refer to a biological female who identifies as a man. The reason for refusing is that if we use such pronouns, we speak against the truth. We suggest that we do not think the body really reveals the person, and we fail to do what we can to protect people from the significant harms that gender ideology can inflict.

## REACHING HEARTS BY PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST

The reasons set forth in this Response illustrate why Catholic leaders have spoken so strongly against this ideology, which Pope Francis called “extremely dangerous since it cancels differences in its claim to make everyone equal.”<sup>41</sup> Gender ideology is radically at odds with Christian anthropology, harms vulnerable persons and those who love them, and affects all with its compelled speech and behavior. But I am well aware that explanations alone, no matter how coherent, rarely have the power to move people who are in pain and who



have been persuaded that they will be able to resolve their pain only by rejecting their sexual identity.

All of us have experienced pain of various kinds, and we know that when pain is intense enough, it is hard to think about anything except how to get rid of the pain. When people hear teachings that conflict with their own understanding of who they are

**“the body reveals the person. And our personhood is beloved by God”**

and what they need to be happy, it can seem to them that no explanation could possibly justify such teachings and that they must be rejected out of hand. Indeed, those who suffer are likely to be tempted to reject the very faith that proposes teachings so radically at odds with the way they feel. They rightly reason that if God is good, he surely wants them to be happy, but they may mistakenly assume that those teachings close off the only path that can bring them happiness.

How can we respond to such a seemingly impossible situation? The answer is surely not to water down Catholic teachings, which are meant to clarify and defend, in the light of faith, the truth and value of God’s great gift of our engendered bodily life. For, as Pope Saint John Paul II taught, it is in and through our bodies that our distinct personhood is expressed: the body reveals the person. And our personhood is beloved by God. It is sacred. Indeed, it is created in His image. For the Church to fail to defend and proclaim these truths would be a great disservice to all the faithful, but especially to those who struggle

with gender confusion, for today's noxious ideologies make these persons particularly vulnerable to grave and irreversible harm.

The answer, rather, is to communicate first and foremost the love of God in Jesus Christ by proclaiming the same gospel we all need to hear. People are hardly likely to respond to catechesis, especially catechesis that conflicts with what they think they need to find happiness, unless they are first transformed by the basic gospel message. They need to experience that message as personal, and through it have an encounter with the Lord himself. Otherwise the Church's teaching on the dignity of the human body is liable to fall on deaf ears.

That gospel teaches that God created us in love. Our sin alienated us from him, leaving both the world and our hearts profoundly broken, and that brokenness expresses itself in unspeakable suffering. But not content to leave us in our sinful brokenness, God sent His own beloved son to die on the cross for us. Through Jesus's redemptive death and resurrection, God frees us from our sin, adopts us as His sons and daughters, fills us with His Holy Spirit, and sets us on the path to eternal happiness in the kingdom.

Our Lord invites each of us to respond to this great offer of salvation. But respond we must. Receiving the fruits of Christ's redemption is not automatic. It is always possible not to respond, and so to fail to share in the joy that Christ offers us. But to those who turn to him with faith, he offers these consoling words: "I know well the plans I have in mind for you . . . plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope" (Jer 29:11).

An active relationship with Jesus can bring hope to our lives as we deal with the confusion, weakness, frustration, discouragement, disappointment and sinfulness of the human condition. Jesus approached the people of His time with the same invitation he extends to all people of our time through His Church: this is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom



of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel (Mk 1:15). By making an act of faith, entrusting our future to God's care, renouncing our sins, and living as active members of the Church, our lives (including our sufferings) take on an eternal meaning in light of God's love for us that offers so much more than the trending and passing ideologies of our time.

We need to help those who suffer come to know Jesus personally, communicate to him the concerns of their hearts, and learn from him that *nothing is impossible for God*—including giving them the grace to recognize and even rejoice in the goodness of their bodies as he created them. They, like all of us, will need to remain faithful through a fearsome struggle, but by their fidelity they will win the crown of victory, for by cooperating with Christ they will be shaping themselves into the saints he calls them to be forever. Indeed, the Lord



wishes to empower each of us to recover the spousal meaning of the body by awakening us to the goodness of our membership in *his* Body even now, and to the hope of sharing His resurrection life in the kingdom he has prepared for those who love him.

### MY HEARTFELT APPEAL TO THOSE WHO SUFFER FROM GENDER CONFUSION

To those who struggle with gender confusion, I want you to know that you are not alone. Christ loves you. The Church loves you. And I love you. I think about you and pray for you. You need to know that you are not doing

**In the midst  
of any  
darkness,  
weakness,  
sinfulness,  
or painful  
confusion,  
we find the  
stability  
we need in  
Christ's love**

anything wrong by having painful feelings about your sexual identity.

I know that the temptations of the world, flesh, and devil, are strong. They urge you to reject your God-given masculinity or femininity. Stand firm against them, for they are noxious and deadly. They do not have your best interests in mind. Therefore, among all the things you do to strengthen yourself against them, do not neglect to pray often, frequent the sacraments, and seek out Christian fellowship.

Please also know that your sufferings, though painful, are not meaningless. United to the sufferings of Christ, your struggles contribute to the redemption of the world. In the midst of any darkness, weakness, sinfulness, or painful confusion, we find the stability we need in Christ's love in

order to turn to him and become dependent on him such that our whole self, mind, body, soul, emotions are healed through grace. So please do not lose hope. Remember that in our Father's house, which awaits those who bear their crosses faithfully (Mt 16:24), all suffering shall cease, all confusion shall be dispelled, and every good desire shall be fulfilled. Facing your sufferings with faith will lead you to greater holiness and virtue. As Saint Paul writes: "...affliction produces endurance, and endurance proven character, and proven character hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:3-5).

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It is my sincere hope that these reflections have been helpful, and that you have found them clear in doctrinal emphasis, insightful in scientific data, and foundational for a pastoral approach. I encourage you to reflect prayerfully on the truths offered here and make them your own. As chief teacher and shepherd of the Diocese of Toledo, I believe that the truths contained herein are fundamental for our understanding of and response to the challenges of gender ideology. I encourage all priests, deacons, seminarians, consecrated religious, teachers in our Catholic schools, parish catechists and those engaged in religious education, parents, and all the faithful to make these truths their own and share them with fidelity, understanding and charity.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Until recently, the term gender was identified with a person's sexual identity; gender meant the state of being male or female. Since the middle of the 20th century, the meaning of gender has been in flux. Today, among proponents of gender ideology (or, more accurately, gender ideologies), the term has no fixed meaning. It is therefore advisable to use the term "gender" only with the greatest care. For purposes of this document, when referring to the human person's identity as male/man or female/woman, the synonymous terms "sex," "sexual identity," or "the human body's sexed nature" are used.  
Human sexual identity is expressed in physiological features of the male and female bodies. These features orient the male and female person for a particular function in human reproduction: the male penetrating the female and inseminating her; the female receiving the insemination and facilitating the fertilization of gametes. Males and females perform these functions jointly with each other (i.e., always and only with the opposite sex). Because human reproduction is necessarily binary—characterized by two parts, male and female—sex is necessarily binary. There is no "third sex". Sexual difference (or the binary nature of sex) is a scientific claim, a claim that aligns with the Christian faith ("male and female he created them", Gen. 5:2).
- 2 USCCB, Committee on Doctrine, *Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body*, par. 6, citing Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no 56; available at <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Doctrinal%20Note%202023-03-20.pdf>
- 3 Victor Madrigal-Borloz, *Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Practices of exclusion*, no. 14 (United Nations Human Rights Council, July 15, 2021); available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a76152-protection-against-violence-and-discrimination-based-sexual>
- 4 According to the *World Professional Association of Transgender Health* (WPATH), a global transgender advocacy organization: "Transgender and gender diverse (TGD) persons may require medically necessary gender-affirming hormone therapy (GAHT) to achieve changes consistent with their embodiment goals, gender identity, or both..." E. Coleman, et al, "Standards of Care for the Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse People, Version 8," *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 23:sup1, S1-S259, at S110. DOI: 10.1080/26895269.2022.2100644; abstract available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36238954>.
- 5 USCCB, *Doctrinal Note*, pars. 13, 16.
- 6 Jason Evert, *Male, Female, Other?: A Catholic Guide to Understanding Gender*, (Scottsdale: Totus Tuus Press, 2022), p. 220.
- 7 Emily A. Vogels, et al, "Teens, Social Media, and Technology," *Pew Research Center*, August 10, 2022; available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/>
- 8 "Transgender" is the fourth most popular search category on Pornhub (from U.S. IP addresses). Andrew Court, "Pornhub reveals most popular 2022 Searches – Texas you should be ashamed," *New York Post*, December 13, 2022; available at <https://nypost.com/2022/12/13/pornhub-unveils-most-popular-2022-searches/>.
- 9 "In 2021, 75.5 percent of high school students identified as heterosexual, the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) found. Among high school students, 12.2 percent identified as bisexual, 5.2 percent as questioning, 3.9 percent as other, 3.2 percent as gay or lesbian and 1.8 percent said they didn't understand the question. The CDC says the number of LGBTQ students went from 11 percent in 2015 to 26 percent in 2021." Lexi Lonas, "1 in 4 High School Students Identifies as LGBTQ," *The Hill*, April 27, 2023; available at <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/3975959-one-in-four-high-school-students-identify-as-lgbtq/>.
- 10 Kacie M. Kidd, et al., "Prevalence of Gender-Diverse Youth in an Urban School District," *Pediatrics*, vol. 147 (no.



- 6) (June 2021), e2020049823. 10.1542/peds.2020-049823; available at <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/147/6/e2020049823/180292/Prevalence-of-Gender-Diverse-Youth-in-an-Urban?autologincheck=redirected>; cf. Kacie M. Kidd et al, “The Prevalence of Gender-Diverse Youth in a Rural Appalachian Region,” *JAMA Pediatrics* (2022). DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.2768, which found that among rural youth, 7.2% identified as transgender or gender-diverse.
- 11 According to some gender theorists, the number of perceived “identities” is limitless: “Gender is a spectrum, and there is no finite number of gender identities. In fact, there are infinite places you can land on.” See <https://www.womenshealthmag.com/relationships/a36395721/gender-identity-list/>.
- 12 The APA defines “gender dysphoria” in ideological terms (“psychological distress that results from an incongruence between one’s sex assigned at birth and one’s gender identity”) based on false anthropological premises (that sex is “assigned” arbitrarily rather than determined at conception, and that a person’s authentic identity is reflected in his or her self-perceived “gender identity”). <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria>.
- 13 Clinicians who provide these medical or surgical interventions increasingly justify their practices as consumer-driven efforts to help clients achieve their “embodiment goals.” See Marrow E. “‘Why should other people be the judge’: The codification of assessment criteria for gender-affirming care, 1970s-1990s,” *Hist Psychol.* 26(3) (Aug. 2023), 210-246. doi: 10.1037/hop0000238; available at <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2023-97851-001.html>.
- 14 Wright JD, et al., “National Estimates of Gender-Affirming Surgery in the US,” *JAMA Netw Open* 6(8) (2023); doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.30348; available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2808707?adv=000003824755>.
- 15 Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dignitas infinita* (On Human Dignity) (August 4, 2024) 59.
- 16 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 365.
- 17 CCC 364; the internal quotation is from GS 14 § 1; see also Dan 3:57-80.
- 18 One’s identity as male or female is determined at conception. This is true even in cases where it may be difficult to discern the sex of a person. “Persons affected by Disorders of Sexual Development do not fall outside the two categories of male and female, but they do exhibit ambiguous or abnormal indicators of sexual difference, so that the sex of their bodies is difficult to determine, though not impossible for modern medical and genetic techniques.” USCCB, *Doctrinal Note*, par. 3, n. 8.
- 19 John Paul II develops this theme in his “theology of the body,” which he presented during his general audiences as a series of 129 catecheses. They are available in Michael Waldstein, trans., *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline, 2006). See, for example, the General Audience of January 9, 1980, pp. 181–85.
- 20 CCC 2205: “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.”
- 21 Some secularists, however, are pure materialists; that is, they deny the existence of any spiritual reality at all. They consider human life as more developed than but not different in kind from the rest of the material universe. So, like dualists, they deny that the human body has inherent personal value.
- 22 Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), p. 42.
- 23 See Will Malone, et al., “No One is Born in ‘the Wrong Body,’” *Quillette*, September 24, 2019; available at <https://quillette.com/2019/09/24/no-one-is-born-in-the-wrong-body/>.
- 24 See CCC 405, 417. For a brief and helpful commentary on the spousal meaning of the body, the role of concupiscence in obscuring that meaning, and the gift of rediscovering it through union with Christ, see William May, “The Scriptures, Human Sexuality and Sexual Morality, and Pope John Paul II’s “Theology of The Body”; available at <http://www.christendom-awake.org/pages/may/scriptures.htm>.
- 25 John Paul II, General Audience of May 28,

- 1980, in Waldstein, trans., *Man and Woman*, pp. 242–46, at 243.
- 26 Bishop Michael Burbidge, “A Catechesis on the Human Person and Gender Ideology,” August 12, 2021; available at <https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/bishop/public-messages/2021/a-catechesis-on-the-human-person-and-gender-ideology/>.
  - 27 Kozłowska K, et al., “Attachment Patterns in Children and Adolescents with Gender Dysphoria,” *Front Psychol.* (2021); doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.582688; available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33510668/>; Kaltiala R, et al., “Family Characteristics, Transgender Identity and Emotional Symptoms in Adolescence: A Population Survey Study,” *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 20(4) (2023), 2948; doi: 10.3390/ijerph20042948; available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36833645/>; Elkadi J, Chudleigh C, Maguire AM, Ambler GR, Scher S, Kozłowska K., et al., “Developmental Pathway Choices of Young People Presenting to a Gender Service with Gender Distress: A Prospective Follow-Up Study,” *Children (Basel)* 10(2) (2023), 314; doi: 10.3390/children10020314; available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36832443/>.
  - 28 See Ginny Gentles, “Transgender Activists Manipulate Parents with Suicide Threats,” *The Daily Signal*, June 17, 2022; available at <https://www.dailysignal.com/2022/06/17/transgender-activists-manipulate-parents-with-suicide-threats/>.
  - 29 Institute of Medicine, “Exploring the biological contributions to human health: Does Sex Matter?”; available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK222288/>. See the executive summary, which notes that “every cell has a sex.” See also <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/our-bodies-replace-billions-of-cells-every-day/>.
  - 30 For example, University of Michigan’s comprehensive gender services program refers to double mastectomy as “chest masculinizing surgery;” see web description at <https://www.uofmhealth.org/conditions-treatments/transgender-services/chest-surgery>.
  - 31 USCCB, *Doctrinal Note*, par. 8.
  - 32 “Body Dysmorphic Disorder,” Mayo Clinic; see <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/body-dysmorphic-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20353938>.
  - 33 Barrow, E., & Oyeboade, F., “Body integrity identity disorder: Clinical features and ethical dimensions,” *BJPsych Advances*, 25(3) (2019), 187-195. doi:10.1192/bja.2018.55; available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/bjpsych-advances/article/body-integrity-identity-disorder-clinical-features-and-ethical-dimensions/C5D03563635EBBA854B517CD8730FDF6>.
  - 34 Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter Books, 2019), 153, notes that for some gender theorists, the idea “that gender is socially constructed and not naturally linked to the body does not go far enough. Thus, Judith Butler maintains that even the body is a ‘social construct.’” She “doesn’t think there’s a gender identity inside of us, waiting to be discovered,” but holds instead a view that has become widely shared—that one is free to choose whatever “identity” one happens to desire “without needing to justify the choice.” However, some proponents of gender ideology are unwilling to embrace that view because a diagnosis of “gender dysphoria” is often required for insurance coverage of medical/surgical body-altering interventions.
  - 35 Encyclical Letter *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), no. 56; available at [https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf). See also Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio Finalis* (24 October 2015), 58; available at [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20151026\\_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html).
  - 36 See the testimonies at *Sex Change Regret*, available at <https://sexchangeregret.com/>. See also Jennifer Lahl and Kallie Fell, *The Detransition Diaries* (Ignatius Press, 2024).
  - 37 “Suicide Facts and Myths,” *Transgender Trend*; see <https://www.transgendertrend.com/the-suicide-myth/>.
  - 38 Dianna Kenny explains the phenomenon in her aptly titled article, “An open secret: social contagion is driving the astronomic rise in teen gender dysphoria” (MercatorNet



- © 2023), <https://www.mercatornet.com/an-open-secret-social-contagion-is-driving-the-astronomic-rise-in-teen-gender-dysphoria>; republished by *Person and Identity*; available at <https://personandidentity.com/an-open-secret-social-contagion-is-driving-the-astronomic-rise-in-teen-gender-dysphoria/>.
- 39 European countries have backed away from medical and surgical interventions because of long-term data illustrating that transition does not resolve the risk of suicide; see Society for Evidence Based Gender Medicine, “Denmark Joins the List of Countries That Have Sharply Restricted Youth Gender Transitions,” August 17, 2023; available at <https://segm.org/Denmark-sharply-restricts-youth-gender-transitions>. One study found that 10-20 years after surgical “gender transition,” these patients had 19 times the suicide rate of the general population; see Dhejne C. et al., “Long-term follow-up of transsexual persons undergoing sex reassignment surgery: cohort study in Sweden,” *PLoS One* 6(2) (2011), e16885; doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0016885; available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21364939/>. Suicide among trans-identified persons occurred at every stage of transition and post-care. Average time to suicide was over 6 years after transition initiated; see Wiepjes CM, et al., “Trends in suicide death risk in transgender people: results from the Amsterdam Cohort of Gender Dysphoria study (1972-2017),” *Acta Psychiatr Scand* 141(6) (2020), 486-491; doi: 10.1111/acps.13164; available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/acps.13164>.
- 40 As Archbishop Coakley aptly says, “The movement is, simply put, an evil infecting our world in this time and place, and it must be rejected completely even as we love unconditionally those bound in its snares,” “On the Unity of the Body and Soul: Accompanying Those Experiencing Gender Dysphoria,” April 30, 2023; available at [https://archoc.org/documents/2023/5/On%20the%20Unity%20of%20the%20Body%20and%20Soul\\_Archbishop%20Paul%20Coakley\\_Pastoral%20Letter\\_English\\_2023-2.pdf](https://archoc.org/documents/2023/5/On%20the%20Unity%20of%20the%20Body%20and%20Soul_Archbishop%20Paul%20Coakley_Pastoral%20Letter_English_2023-2.pdf). Although the pain of those who suffer gender confusion is real, so too are the toxic cultural forces that exploit that pain by encouraging gender-confused individuals to reject their bodily identities.
- 41 *Dignitas infinita* 56. Pope Francis strongly rejects the idea that “to be a woman or to be a man, [could] be an option and not a fact of nature” and soberly warns that “gender ideology” is “one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations.” See respectively: “Excerpts from ‘Politics and Society,’ a new book-length interview with the Holy Father,” *Aleteia* (September 1, 2017), available at [https://aleteia.org/2017/09/01/pope-francis-on-celibacy-child-abusers-same-sex-unions-secularism-and-traditionalists/?utm\\_campaign=NL\\_en&utm\\_content=NL\\_en&utm\\_medium=mail&utm\\_source=daily\\_newsletter](https://aleteia.org/2017/09/01/pope-francis-on-celibacy-child-abusers-same-sex-unions-secularism-and-traditionalists/?utm_campaign=NL_en&utm_content=NL_en&utm_medium=mail&utm_source=daily_newsletter); Interview with journalist Elisabetta Piqué for the Argentine daily newspaper *La Nación*, *Catholic New Agency*, Rome (March 11, 2023), available at <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253845/pope-francis-gender-ideology-is-one-of-the-most-dangerous-ideological-colonizations-today>.

## INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

- Person and Identity - Offers information, workshops, and pastoral guidance on transgender issues and the human person - <https://personandidentity.com/>
- Ruah Woods Institute - Provides Theology of the Body curriculum and resources - <https://ruahwoodsintstitute.org>
- Partners for Ethical Care - a secular grassroots organization supporting efforts to stop the unethical treatment of children by schools and healthcare providers under the duplicitous banner of gender identity affirmation - <https://www.partnersforethicalcare.com/>
- SexChangeRegret-Storiesandresources from those who have detransitioned - <https://sexchangeregret.com/>
- Catholic Therapists - A directory of mental health professionals who are faithful to the Magisterium - <https://www.catholictherapists.com/>
- Gender Exploratory Therapy Association - A secular directory of mental health professionals who focus on the psychological issues contributing to gender dysphoria - <https://www.genderexploratory.com/>
- Courage - A ministry helping those with same sex attraction live chaste lives; EnCourage - A ministry helping the loved ones of those with same sex attraction - <https://couragerc.org/>; in Detroit: [Same Sex Attraction - Archdiocese of Detroit](#)
- Eden Invitation - Explores personal integration and promotes solidarity beyond the LGBT+ paradigm" - <https://www.edeninvitation.com/>
- Truth and Love - A Catholic resource for anyone seeking the tools to accompany our brothers and sisters who experience same-sex attraction - <https://truthandlove.com/>
- Society for Evidence Based Gender Medicine - Group of clinicians and researchers explaining the evidence for various gender dysphoria treatments - <https://segm.org/>
- Cretella, M., et al. (2018), American College of Pediatricians - "Gender Dysphoria in Children" - Argues that a medical protocol for sex change "is founded upon an unscientific gender ideology, lacks an evidence base, and violates the long-standing ethical principle of 'First do no harm'" - <https://acpeds.org/position-statements/gender-dysphoria-in-children>
- Paul McHugh, M.D. (former Psychiatrist-in-Chief, The Johns Hopkins Hospital) - "Surgical Sex: Why we stopped doing sex change operations" - [Why the First Hospital to Do Sex-Reassignment Surgeries No Longer Does Them](#)
- Ryan T. Anderson - When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment - a nuanced and accessible treatment of transgenderism drawing on key insights from biology, psychology, and philosophy - <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/02/when-amazon-erased-my-book>
- Sr. Mary Prudence Allen - "Gender Reality" - A scholarly article explaining gender ideology, exploring its history, and proposing a way forward - [Sr Mary Prudence Allen, Gender Reality - PhilArchive](#)
- Margaret H. McCarthy - "Gender Ideology and the Humanum" - a scholarly critique of the theory of gender as a "social construct" - <https://www.communio-icr.com/articles/view/gender-ideology-and-the-humanum>.

- Congregation for Catholic Education - [Male and Female He Created Them](#)
- Pope Benedict XVI - [Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia](#)
- USCCB - [Gender Ideology Teaching Resources](#) (includes quotations from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and recent popes)
- USCCB - [Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body](#)
- Scandinavian Bishops' Conference - [NBK Pastoral Letter Lent 2023 EN](#)
- Diocese of Arlington - [A Catechesis on the Human Person and Gender Ideology](#)
- Archdiocese of Denver - [The Splendor of the Human Person](#)
- Diocese of Lansing - [Policy on the Human Body as a Constitutive Aspect of the Human Person](#);
- Accompanying Theological Guide: [The Human Person and Gender Dysphoria](#)
- Archdiocese of Oklahoma City - [Pastoral Letter on the Unity of Body and Soul](#)
- Archdiocese of St. Louis - [Compassion and Challenge: Reflections on gender ideology](#)
- Diocese of Springfield in Illinois - [Pastoral-Guide-and-650-Gender-Identity-Policy.pdf](#)
- USCCB - [Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body](#)

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- 1 Jacob Jordaens, *Adam and Eve*, c. 1642, oil on canvas, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio.
- 2 Leonardo da Vinci, *The Vitruvian Man*, c. 1490, ink drawing, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.
- 5 Bartolomeo Caporali, *Madonna della Misericordia*, c. 1482, tempera on panel, Museo Civico di San Francesco, Italy.
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- 10 Marx Reichlich, *Meeting of Mary and Elisabeth*, c. first half of the 16th century, wood, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.
- 13 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*, c. 1637, oil on canvas, private collection.
- 14 Jacob Jordaens, *Christ on the Cross with Mary, Mary Magdalene and John the Evangelist*, c. 1628, Oil on Canvas, Laure Museum in Paris, France
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## ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE SAINTS

Saint Augustine of Hippo: “God gives where he finds empty hands.”

*“Entrust the past to the mercy of God, the present to His love, the future to His Providence.”*

Blessed Carlo Acutis: “Our frenetic pace of life has made us forget that each of us must climb Golgotha sooner or later.”

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton: “We know certainly that our God calls us to a holy life. We know that he gives us every grace, every abundant grace; and though we are so weak of ourselves, this grace is able to carry us through every obstacle and difficulty.”

Saint Faustina Kowalska “My child, life on earth is a struggle indeed; a great struggle for my Kingdom. But fear not, because you are not alone. I am always supporting you, so lean on Me as you struggle, fearing nothing. Take the vessel of trust and draw from the fountain of life.”

Saint Francis de Sales: “Grace is never wanting. God always gives each soul the grace necessary for salvation.”

*“Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering, or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace then, put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.”*

“Don’t get upset with your imperfections. It’s a great mistake because it leads nowhere – to get angry because you are angry, upset at being upset, depressed at being depressed, disappointed because you are disappointed. So don’t fool yourself. Simply surrender to the Power of God’s Love, which is always

greater than our weakness.”

Saint John of the Cross: “The road is narrow. He who wishes to travel it more easily must cast off all things and use the cross as his cane. In other words, he must be truly resolved to suffer willingly for the love of God in all things.”

Pope Saint John Paul II: “You are not the sum of your weaknesses and failures; you are the sum of the Father’s love for you and your real capacity to become the image of His Son.”

Saint Padre Pio: “God will never permit anything to happen to us that is not for our greater good.”

*“Suffering born in a Christian way is the condition that God, the author of all grace and of all the gifts that lead to salvation, has established for granting us glory.”*

Saint Teresa of the Andes: “We are co-redeemers of the world; and souls are not redeemed without the Cross.”

Saint Teresa of Avila: “Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you, all things are passing; God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing. God alone suffices.”

Saint Teresa of Calcutta “A sacrifice to be real must cost, must hurt, and must empty ourselves. Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in his love than in your weakness.”

Saint Therese of Lisieux: “Everything is a grace, everything is the direct effect of our Father’s love — difficulties, contradictions, humiliations, all the soul’s miseries, her burdens, her needs — everything, because through them she learns humility, realizes her weakness.”



*" 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him ... ' But Jesus came and touched them saying, 'Rise, and do not be afraid.' "*  
(Mt 17: 5,7)



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