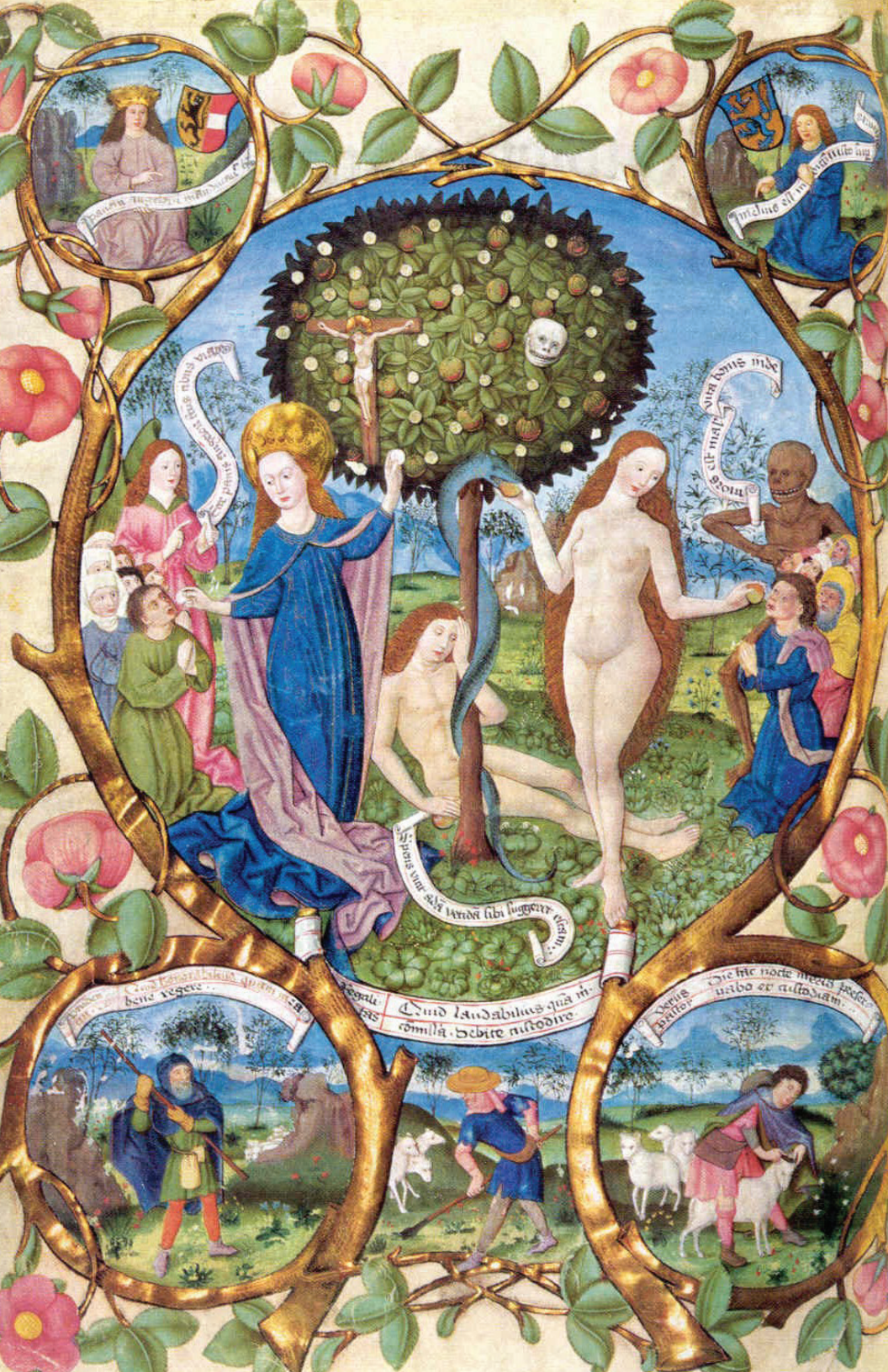


The Splendor of the Human Person: A Catholic Vision of the Person and Sexuality



ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER



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State of the Issue

“Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way. In a culture without truth, this is the fatal risk facing love.”

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate

Jesus Christ has established the Church to communicate his revealed truth and to heal and elevate humanity through his grace. This mission necessarily includes communicating the truth of God’s creation, especially the nature of the human person, and helping all people of good will to embrace and live in this truth. God has created the person to share in the splendor of his love, as Archbishop Aquila relates in his pastoral letter, *The Splendor of Love*: “The splendor of God’s love shining in our hearts enables us to embrace the truth about sexuality and marriage and leads us to imitate the generous, sacrificial love found at the heart of the Trinity. It gives us the grace to live like Christ, to embrace our sufferings by uniting them to his cross, and to find true happiness in giving ourselves away in love.”¹

1 Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila, *The Splendor of Love* (Feb. 2, 2018), https://archden.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/splendor-of-love_web.pdf. See also Pope St. Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (1968).

The good news of the Gospel communicates true freedom through the love of God, the love that has made us in his image and likeness and which remakes us through adoption as sons and daughters of the Father. Truly, it is only in Jesus Christ that we can understand our true identity and realize it through the grace that comes from his Cross and Resurrection.² Christ reveals the splendor of the human person to us.

Many people today, however, experience confusion related to life's meaning and purpose, especially as related to their own identity. This personal experience relates to a long trajectory of cultural change and secularization of society. Western culture, for instance, has very quickly abandoned traditional understandings of sexuality and has embraced an ideology that presents human sexuality as non-binary (not confined to male and female) and "gender" as fluid. This ideology now permeates our media, entertainment, politics, law, and education, and is being promoted and advocated for in unprecedented manners. Characterized by its proponents as an altruistic movement to be compassionate, loving, and inclusive, the ideology is one that through incomplete and agenda-driven medicine and psychology has disregarded sound medical and psychological protocols which exist to protect people from undue medical and psychological harm.

The Church stands against this new ideology of human sexuality out of its concern for the true good of the human person. The Church's task is to help people to understand their true dignity and, even amid suffering and confusion, to come to accept it with the help of God's grace. The National Catholic Bioethics Center, for instance, explains why the Church must continue to communicate the truth in love:

Human persons act against their own good when they directly intend what is contrary to their own nature, purpose, and identity and thereby impair their flourishing. An act that is incapable of being ordered to the good of the person will not bring about individual flourishing; under no circumstances can it be consonant with the person's genuine fulfillment.³

2 See *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), 22, "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light."

3 See National Catholic Bioethics Center, "Brief Statement on Transgenderism" (Feb. 22, 2017), <https://www.ncbcenter.org/resources/news/ncbc-brief-statement-transgenderism/>.

This new sexual ideology harms people by denying the common sense, scientifically verified understanding of the human person as male and female with unique, yet complementary, sexual characteristics. Instead, it emphasizes unrestrained “freedom” for people to live as they please and not be bound by any limitations. Even if moved by a desire to be loving and compassionate toward those experiencing confusion with their sexual identity, the ideology of the human person that now prevails is ultimately uncharitable because it distorts our relationship with God as Creator (refusing to accept the body as God’s gift), denies the truth about who we are, and destroys the ability to experience the authentic human fulfillment and freedom that comes from embracing, expressing, and loving through our true and natural humanity as male or female.

Today, we see many schools, government officials, medical and psychological practitioners, and parents who have been drawn into a largescale social experiment at the expense of children. We already have evidence of the damaging effects of attempts at “gender transition,” many of which are permanent. These outcomes confirm the truth that God has both revealed and instilled into nature and the human person. The Church has the paramount obligation to communicate the truth in service of others, for, as Pope Benedict XVI said: “Only in truth does charity shine forth, only in truth can charity be authentically lived.”⁴ Although gender ideology presents itself as the compassionate response, it does not truly respect the dignity of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God and leads people to live contrary to their truth of their own being and supernatural calling. Furthermore, this ideology has created a new form of intolerance, trying to silence voices and any opposition in a way that Pope Benedict has described as the “dictatorship of relativism,” and which Pope Francis calls “ideological colonization.”

Many Catholics do not know how to respond to these very recent challenges and may even feel embarrassed or intimidated to communicate truths so out of step with the current cultural climate. Because much of the current climate is inherently atheistic, it poses dangers to our mission of evangelizing for the sake of leading people to embrace God’s gift of eternal life. Under these circum-

4 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), §3.

stances, the Church is obligated to equip the faithful with an understanding of God's creation of the world, the nature of the human person, the importance of human sexuality, and the grace and virtue needed to be truly alive and happy on our way to eternal life. The truths of our faith give Catholics resources to engage in charitable conversation with others on controversial issues related to sex and gender. In fact, although the Church's view may be unpopular, we have the support of medicine and science.

In response to these recent developments and pressures, inspired by a profound love for the human person, especially for those who are experiencing confusion with their sexual identity, the Catholic Church in Northern Colorado seeks to guide its parishes and schools in responding to these misunderstandings of the human person and sexuality, and mistaken views of sex and "gender." Any adequate response must include God's revelation, but also the findings of medicine and science that reflect the truth inherent in God's creation. Indeed, the harmony between science and the Church's teaching on these matters is an illustration of the Church's conviction that faith and reason cannot contradict each other.

This brief document seeks to provide a basic outline for addressing issues of the human person, sexuality and gender for use within parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Denver. This is necessary due to the widespread confusion faced by so many Catholics in the face of widespread ideology. The document will articulate the Church's teaching in succinct fashion, examine some key findings from medicine and science, and provide an overview of terminology related to "gender transition." It is meant to serve as a resource to guide thinking and discussions and to serve as a complement to policy guidelines.

A detail of Michelangelo's famous fresco, "The Creation of Adam," from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It depicts Adam on the left, reclining and reaching out with his right arm, and God on the right, reclining and reaching out with his right arm. The two hands are just inches apart, creating a sense of tension and divine spark. The background shows other figures in a reclined position, partially obscured.

The Church's Vision of the Person and Sexuality

It is essential that Catholics, particularly those working for the Church in parishes and schools, as well as the young people to whom the Church ministers in our parishes and schools, receive formation in the Church's teaching on the human person and sexuality. Catholic parishes and schools exist to express the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of salvation, and to make disciples. Anyone coming to the Church has the right to receive the truth of God's creation and revelation in its entirety. Christian sexual ethics reflects important truths about the relationship between men and women, the dignity of persons, and the value of love for men and women. As Catholics we are called to live according to God's plan for life and love, including his plan for human sexuality. We are called to prophetic witness, even as our culture increasingly denies the truth and meaning of sexuality and indeed doubts the possibility of moral truth altogether. Living according to this plan and witnessing to the truth and meaning of human sexuality should never be regarded as a burden, but as an inspiring source of grace and hope.

The Church serves the human person by striving to bring God's compassion to each person. God is a loving Father, and his love is shown first in the great gift of creation. He has made human beings as a body-soul unity, with the soul as the life of the body, what truly forms it as uniquely human. Human beings are different from every other creature in the physical world in that we can understand the truth of things and make free choices based upon this understanding.

Our spiritual identity is expressed in the world through the body, enabling us to learn, communicate, and express love. The Church defends the integrity of God's creation, respecting his lordship over creation and the wisdom by which he has endowed all things with the integrity of their own particular nature. The Church holds that faith and reason cannot be in contradiction and that together they manifest the splendor of the human person.

Sacred Scripture provides a rich revelation of the human person as a body-soul unity. The creation account in Genesis reveals that men and women are made in the image and likeness of God: this means that we are free and rational creatures, capable of knowing God and loving him. "The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 233, 1700). Sexual identity, embodiment as either a man or a woman is a gift that is given to us from the moment of creation (CCC 383, 2333). Sexual difference is the source of the complementarity that enables complete self-giving in the marital act and makes possible "the generation of new life" (CCC 2333). In fidelity to this revelation, the Catholic Church teaches that through marriage, a man and woman form "an intimate communion of life and love" based on their free mutual consent (CCC 1603, 1660, 1662). Marriage is characterized by permanence, faithfulness and openness to life, and is ordered "to the good of the couple as well as the generation and education of children" (CCC 1660, 1664).



God has established the human person and the complementarity of man and woman to reflect his own Trinitarian love as a communion of persons. Marriage itself has an objective reality that arises from the physical and spiritual partnership that God intended for husband and wife within the family. In keeping with God's plan for marriage, therefore, every act of sexual intercourse must be open to the creation of new human life, and the generation of children must take place through the marital act. Contraception, sterilization, and in vitro fertilization procedures separate the unitive and procreative meanings of marriage, thus violating the meaning of marriage. In contrast, Natural Family Planning methods respect God's design for marriage and the family if they are guided by the virtues of chastity, justice, and conjugal charity (see CCC 2369, 2370, 2376). The flourishing of marriage and family life depends upon proper respect for the nature of human love and sexuality.

The moral and spiritual strength of families relates directly to the health of society and the Church. In families, children learn to be good citizens as well as good Christians. As the foundation of the family, marriage is not merely a private institution, but is important for the common good. The Church teaches that the family is the "basic cell of society," and, therefore, "the future of humanity passes by way of the family."⁵ It is not unjust or discriminatory to uphold the nature and meaning of marriage as a permanent, faithful and fruitful union of one man and one woman. Moreover, because same-sex relationships, including those in which one partner identifies as transgender, distort the truth and meaning of sexual identity by suggesting that mothers and fathers are interchangeable, it is not unjust to oppose their equation with marriage. In fact, Catholics are called to uphold the truth, not simply as an expression of personal religious belief, but as citizens concerned for the well-being of society.

Accepting God's will for humanity, as expressed in his creation of the body, includes accepting the reality of sex as male and female. God has given us our bodies as a gift, which, despite any challenges, must be accepted and guarded.

5 John Paul II, "Teach Whole Truth about Family," (April 1, 1992), 42; John Paul, *Familiaris Consortio*, 86.

Pope Francis described this in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*:

The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek "to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it" (§155).

God has created the body and human sexuality to help humanity reach its true happiness in the gift of self for others. This gift finds expression not only in the complete gift of a man and woman in marriage, but also in the lives of those called to celibacy or to remain single, as they use their bodies to express love through their service to others.



Sexual Attraction

Every state of life calls for chastity, understood as “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being” (CCC 2337). By calling all people to this integration, the Church serves the happiness and full flourishing of every human being which can only come to fruition by respecting the language the Creator has impressed within human nature. The virtue of chastity has become increasingly difficult to form and maintain considering many cultural challenges. The Church continues to point all people to chastity’s crucial importance, as it helps us come to appreciate the mystery of our humanity, including our sexuality, and to come to a maturity that, guided by God’s law, will lead to fulfillment and peace.

The Church’s vision enables us to understand the nature of sexual desire and its proper order to communion within family life. Sexual desire is now described as an orientation that has been separated from the integrated vision of the human person rooted in a Christian anthropology that honors the dignity of the body-soul unity and the foundational understanding of the complementary of male and female. Yet it is important to understand how modern culture defines sexual orientation. According to the American Psychological Association, “Sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction that one feels toward men, toward women, or toward both. Although sexual orientation ranges along a continuum, it is generally discussed in terms of heterosexual—attraction to the other sex—homosexual—attraction to the same

sex—and bisexual—attraction to both sexes.”⁶

Due to the very nature of human sexuality, as ordered toward procreation, the human person, male or female, is properly ordered towards sexual union with the opposite sex. It is why the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, referring to Scripture and the natural law tradition, refers to “homosexual acts” as “intrinsically disordered” (2357). This does not mean that the *person* is disordered but that the *acts*, which are closed off to authentic conjugal union and the transmission of new life, are *not ordered* towards their proper ends. Under no circumstances can homosexual *acts* be approved or affirmed.

The now predominant popular narrative asserts, contrary to research, that persons who identify as “gay, lesbian, or bi-sexual” in sexual orientation are simply “born that way.” Even if genetic predispositions exist, evidence points to a complex interrelation of social, psychological, and relational factors as well.⁷ Sound research demonstrates that sexual desire or orientation can be fluid and subject to change in certain individuals and at some stages, particularly in adolescence. Women also tend to report higher rates of fluidity in sexual desire. It is preferable for Catholic institutions to reference sexual attraction

6 American Psychological Association, *Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel* (2008), <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/just-the-facts>.

7 See, for instance, Andrea Ganna, Karin Verweij, Michel Nivard, et alia, “Large-Scale GWAS Reveals Insights into the Genetic Architecture of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior,” *Science* 30 Aug 2019, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/365/6456/eaat7693>. Paul Sullins, writing for *Public Discourse*, summarizes the implications of the study: “The study contained two key findings. First, it found that the effect of the genes we inherit from our parents (known as ‘heritability’) on same-sex orientation was very weak, at only .32 on a scale from 0 (none) to 1 (total) heritability. This means that a person’s developmental environment—which includes diet, family, friends, neighborhood, religion, and a host of other life conditions—is twice as influential on the probability of developing same-sex behavior or orientation as a person’s genes are. Second, rebutting decades of widespread belief, the study established that ‘there is certainly no single genetic determinant (sometimes referred to as the “gay gene” in the media)’ that causes same-sex sexual behavior. On the contrary, ‘the variants involved are numerous and spread across the genome.’ Each of these genetic variants increases a person’s propensity for same-sex behavior by an infinitesimally small amount. In scientific terms, same-sex orientation and behavior are highly polygenic” (<https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/09/57342/>).

to those of the same sex by referring to “persons who experience same-sex attraction” instead of labeling a person as “gay” or “lesbian” or “bi-sexual,” as if sexual attraction defined the person or constituted the person’s identity. Our deepest identity is found as being made in the image and likeness of God and this reality cannot be overshadowed by our attractions and desires.

The *Catechism* also acknowledges that a homosexual attraction often constitutes a “trial,” and affirms that men and women who experience homosexual inclinations “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God’s will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord’s Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition” (2358). The admonition against “unjust discrimination,” however, does not preclude Catholics or Catholic institutions from making *just distinctions* that may be necessary as a matter of prudence or to ensure faithfulness to the institution’s mission. In fact, sharing the truth with charity and respect shows true love of the person and reflects the call of God to share the Good News of salvation with all people. The Church calls Catholics to accompany with compassion those who struggle with trials related to sexuality. Ultimately, it is only in Christ and his gift of self on the Cross that we can find healing, salvation, and transformation for our whole being, including our sexuality.



A Vision of the Human Person Supported by Science and Medicine

In addition to the Church's teaching on the body and human sexuality, there is much testimony from science and medicine that reinforces the truth of human sexuality and the damage that occurs in attempting to hinder its proper development and exercise. This section provides a brief summary of this testimony, which reinforces an anthropology that takes seriously the nature of the human person as a body-soul unity.

Sex Determination and Sexual Differences

The sex of a human being has been and continues to be determined biologically, a fact known since the discovery of sex chromosomes more than a hundred years ago. From conception, the sexual identity of a person is tied to his or her chromosomal makeup. The person's chromosomes (XX or XY) direct the development of the person's body so that, at maturity, the body is equipped to procreate.⁸ Every cell in the human body can be identified as male or female.⁹

8 Only the Y chromosome carries the Sry gene, which directs the organization of the developing human being as male; a human being without the Sry gene develops as female.

9 T.M. Wizemann and M.L. Pardue, eds. *Exploring the Biological Contributions to Human Health: Does Sex Matter?* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2001), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK222288/>. See also, Janine Austin Clayton. "Applying the New SABV (Sex as a Biological Variable) Policy to Research and Clinical Care," *Physiology & Behavior* 187, no. 1 (April 2018): 2-5, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0031938417302585#!>.

Many differences between the male and female sexes are a result of the differences between the genetic makeup of male and female cells and the differences in the expression of the genetic makeup. Sex differences have been identified at many levels of biological organization, from biochemical to behavioral.¹⁰

These sexual differences have been shown by numerous studies that have found critical differences, including: females have more aggressive immune systems than males; female and male cardiac issues are significantly different; male and female brains develop and “age” differently; and male and female brains are organized differently for language, with men relying on the left inferior frontal ridge of the brain for language tasks, while women use both the left and right inferior ridges. PET scans and MRIs demonstrate many other differences between male and female brains. Professionals can identify a male or female brain by sight, both before and after birth. Brain imaging studies have shown that women have a higher percentage of gray matter while men have a higher percentage of white matter.¹¹

These differences, along with bone structure, muscle mass, heart capacity, and overall flexibility, are but a few of the findings that confirm the unmistakable biological differences that exist between males and females, all a result of their genetic makeup.

Although there are complicated and rare cases of disorders in sexual development, including situations where a person is born with organs of both sexes or where the sex organs are not completely developed one way or another, medical science usually can determine the person’s sex.¹² Medical or surgical interventions in cases of disorders of sexual development may be warranted to address pathology or restore healthy functioning to the person’s body. In contrast, medical or surgical interventions on the healthy body of a person who seeks body modifications for reasons of “gender identity” cannot be morally justified.

10 T.M. Wizemann and M.L. Pardue, eds. “Exploring Biological Contributions to Human Health: Does Sex Matter?” *Journal of Women’s Health and Gender Based Medicine* 5 (June 10, 2001): 433-39.

11 Madhura Ingahlalikar, Alex Smith, et al. “Sex Differences in the Structural Connectome of the Human Brain,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 2 (2014): 823-28.

12 See “FAQs,” *Person and Identity Project*, www.personandidentity.com.

Gender, Gender Dysphoria, Psychological and Health Effects

In the past, “gender” was used as a synonym for sex (male or female), or to describe social aspects of being male or female within a particular culture. Today, however, “gender” has taken on a different meaning incompatible with the Catholic understanding of the human person. Today “gender” refers to a person’s self-representation or identity, as shaped by environment, experience, and personal preference, regardless of biological sex. A person who pursues a “gender transition” rejects his or her sexual identity as male or female in order to assert a “gender identity” at odds with biological sex, whether man, woman, non-binary, or a fluid identity that changes over time. A person who seeks to “transition” might believe that he or she is in the wrong body or feel deep distress over the body’s natural development. This can lead to increasing unhappiness or anxiety which can be diagnosed as gender dysphoria.¹³ In other cases, people become convinced that they must, as a matter of personal autonomy, assert a “gender identity” of their own choosing and will therefore assert

13 See National Catholic Bioethics Center, “Brief Statement on Transgenderism.”



a “right” to transition to the other sex or to a non-binary “identity” without necessarily claiming to be psychologically distressed.

Gender transitioning through behavioral, hormonal, or surgical treatments, is now widely accepted as a form of “therapy.” However, the concept of gender transitioning stands in contradiction to the proper understanding of the nature of the human person. It assumes there is “self” that is separate from the body and which might be in the wrong body. This contradicts the Church’s central teaching that the human person is a body-soul unity and that the integral unity of the body and soul is fundamental to identity of the human person. The body cannot exist separately from the soul and the soul and body together constitute the self. A human person does not just *have* a body – he or she *is* that body. We express this idea when we ask a child, “Did you hurt yourself?” or when someone says, “Don’t touch me!” There is no “true self” apart from the body or “true sexual identity” separable from the sex of the body. God created each person body and soul, and God uses the body to reveal to each person his or her sexual identity as male or female¹⁴. A person’s embrace of his or her God-given sexual identity is an essential part of living a fulfilled relationship with God, with oneself, and with each other (*Laudato Si’*, §155). The integral unity of body and soul is a foundational anthropological truth central to Christianity. The psychological experience of a disconnect with one’s bodily sex is not to be minimized; it calls for appropriate psychotherapy, but it can in no way affirm an “incorrect” sex.

Given this understanding of what it means to be a human person, a body-soul unity whose sexual identity is reflected in the person’s biology, it should be clear that no surgical, hormonal, or other intervention directed toward the body is capable of altering that innate sexual identity. Behavior stereotypically associated with one sex or the other, including mannerisms, social cues, clothing, or modes of speaking, does not alter the innate sexual identity of the embodied spirit which is the human person. Hormonal interventions to block the body’s sex-specific hormones or provide the sex-specific hormones of the opposite sex likewise do not change a person’s innate sexual identity. The use of puberty blocking hormones in children with gender dysphoria is particularly dangerous since this intervention radically disrupts the normal sequence of physical and

14 See *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, §224.

psychological development that occurs during adolescence and the damage cannot be reversed.

So-called gender confirmation surgeries, designed to “masculinize” or “feminize” the body’s appearance according to preference, also cannot modify the true sexual identity of the person, who was created male or female. Attempts at gender transitioning can, in fact, have disastrous effects in the life of a person who continues to struggle to better understand and accept his or her own true value and full identity. Studies show that, even apart from the resulting medical harm, surgical interventions often fail to resolve feelings of anxiety, depression, and dysphoria. Medical or surgical transition is often justified as necessary to reduce the risk of suicide among transgender-identified persons, but studies show that suicides occur during all stages of transition, and the suicide rate of transgender-identified persons remains high, compared to the general population, even post-transition.¹⁵

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- 15 The most thorough study of the long term effects of gender reassignment surgery analyzing records from Sweden from 1973-2003, concluding, “Persons with transsexualism, after sex reassignment, have considerably higher risks for mortality, suicidal behaviour, and psychiatric morbidity than the general population. Our findings suggest that sex reassignment, although alleviating gender dysphoria, may not suffice as treatment for transsexualism, and should inspire improved psychiatric and somatic care after sex reassignment for this patient group.” For the full study, see Cecilia Dhejne, Paul Lichtenstein, et al., “Long-Term Follow-Up of Transsexual Persons Undergoing Sex Reassignment Surgery: Cohort Study in Sweden,” *PLoS One* 6, no. 2 (2011): <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0016885>. See also C.M. Wierpjes, CM, M. den Heijer, M, M.A. Bremmer, et al., “Trends in Suicide Death Risk in Transgender People: Results from the Amsterdam Cohort of Gender Dysphoria Study (1972–2017),” *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* (Feb. 18, 2020), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/acps.13164>.



Terminology Related to Gender “Transition”

In responding to our culture’s confusion related to sex and gender, it is important to understand the dynamics and stages related to gender “transition.” These dynamics are true for anyone, but pose threats for children, whose bodies have not yet fully developed, and who have not reached the ability to make a mature, lifelong decision. The current progression of “transition” (rejecting one’s sexual identity as male or female and asserting a self-determined gender identity at odds with biological sex) occurs in the following four steps:

1. Social transition (new name, pronouns, apparel)
2. Suppression of natural puberty with puberty blockers
3. Hormonal transition with cross-sex hormones
4. Surgeries

Social transition (changing external appearance, name, or pronouns) is often presented as low-risk and fully reversible, although the reality is more complicated. It reinforces the confused child’s false beliefs about “who” he or she is and effectively puts an adult “stamp of approval” on the child’s desired identity, in direct contradiction to the biological reality of the child’s body. Research indicates that “childhood social transitions were important predictors of persistence, especially among natal boys.”¹⁶ Experts also warn that the

16 Steensma, T., et al, “Factors Associated with Desistence and Persistence of Childhood Gender Dysphoria: A Quantitative Follow-Up Study,” *Journal of The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 52 (2013): 582-90, emphasis added.

longer a child is socially transitioned, the more difficult it may be for the child to “desist” and reclaim his or her natural sexual identity.

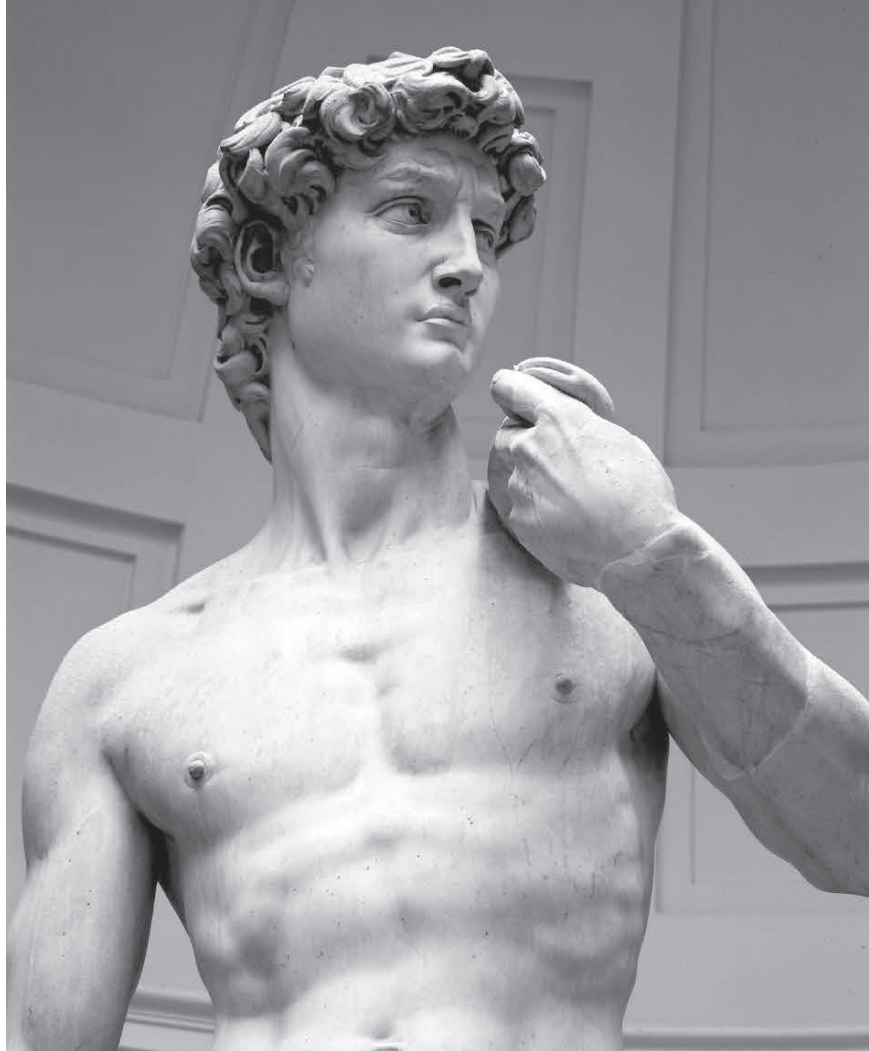
No matter how well-intentioned, helping a child to launch into any stage of “transition” risks life-long harm to that child. Disturbing a child’s body and mind by facilitating a denial of the child’s very nature constitutes child abuse. Is there any other area of life in which adults let young children create their own reality and dictate it to adults? Until recently, a child’s identity confusion (or gender dysphoria) was addressed with patience, letting it resolve naturally, or through family therapy to address underlying causes. Children and adolescents were not encouraged to transition, and studies show that the onset of puberty often helped the child align identity with biological sex. By adulthood, a strong majority of children who struggled with identity or dysphoria but were not “affirmed” in their desired identity came to accept their sex.¹⁷

The long-term damage to the bodies of young people subject to “hormonal therapy” to treat gender incongruence is devastating. **Puberty-blocking hormones** interrupt the normal development of the skeletal, neurological and endocrinological systems in ways that cannot simply be “made up” later. In some cases, puberty-blocking hormones will destroy their future fertility – which could lead to deep remorse throughout their adult lives. The use of puberty blockers in children who have gender dysphoria or incongruence is new, and poorly studied. The few studies available show that nearly 100% of children who use puberty blockers will go on to use cross-sex hormones, leaving them permanently sterile.¹⁸

The use of **cross-hormone therapy** to cause feminizing or masculinizing physical changes in children is increasing at an alarming rate. It has already be-

17 Michael K. Laidlaw, et al., “Letter to the Editor: ‘Endocrine Treatment of Gender-Dysphoric/ Gender-Incongruent Persons: An Endocrine Society Clinical Practice Guideline,’” *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* 104, no. 3 (March 2019): 686-687, <https://academic.oup.com/jcem/article-abstract/104/3/686/5198654?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

18 Norman P. Spack, et al., “Children and Adolescents with Gender Identity Disorder Referred to a Pediatric Medical Center,” *Pediatrics* 129, no. 3 (March, 2012): <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/3/418.long>.



come common practice for patients who self-identify as transgender to receive a prescription for cross-sex hormones on their very first visit to a clinic.¹⁹ The American College of Pediatricians, a national organization of pediatricians and other healthcare professionals dedicated to the health and well-being of children, cautions parents that the best available research shows substantial risks to children from the use of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones. Numerous

19 Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas, Inc., “Transgender Healthcare,” accessed on February 22, 2019, <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-greater-texas/patient-resources/transgender-healthcare>.

studies indicate that cross-sex hormones and puberty blockers raise the risk of heart disease, blood clots, strokes, depression, osteoporosis and arrested bone growth, crippling joint pain, cancer, and suicidal ideations, with the long-term consequences acknowledged as “unknown.”²⁰

Surgical transition includes what are referred to as “top” and “bottom” surgeries. “Top” surgeries can include revisions to a person’s hair, forehead, nose, jaw, neck and breast area. Some aspects of these surgeries can be reversible. “Bottom” surgeries, on the other hand, are irreversible. These include amputation, castration and vaginoplasty (construction of a faux vagina) for feminizing surgeries or hysterectomy/oophorectomy (removal of the uterus and ovaries) and phalloplasty (construction of a prosthetic penis) for masculinizing surgeries. The sobering reality here is that fully functioning organs are mutilated to produce a counterfeit form. Function and fertility are destroyed for a cosmetic counterfeit.

Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria (ROGD)

Parents and some clinicians report a new and increasing phenomenon, described as “Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria” (ROGD), in which teenagers who never previously manifested any question about their sexual identity suddenly announce their desire to transition, typically after exposure to the concept through peers and social media. The phenomenon requires more research, but initial observations describe a sudden unhappiness with one’s sex that happens particularly in female adolescents who showed no signs of discomfort with their sex before puberty.²¹

20 American College of Pediatricians, “Gender Dysphoria in Children” (November 2018): <https://www.acpeds.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/gender-dysphoria-in-children>; Paul W. Hruz, “Deficiencies in Scientific Evidence for Medical Management of Gender Dysphoria,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (2020): 34-42, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0024363919873762?journalCode=lqra>.

21 L. Littman, “Correction: Parent Reports of Adolescents and Young Adults Perceived to Show Signs of a Rapid Onset of Gender Dysphoria,” *PLOS One* 14, no. 3 (Mar. 19, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0214157>; L. Littman, “The Use of Methodologies in Littman (2018) Is Consistent with the Use of Methodologies in Other Studies Contributing to the Field of Gender Dysphoria Research: Response to Restar (2019).” Letters, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (Jan. 17 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01631-z>.

Conclusion

The Church has received a mandate from Jesus to teach in his name and to serve all people through the grace he has given to the community he founded. The truths of creation and God's revelation do not change, although the Church must address new situations that arise. It is an act of charity to teach the truth concerning human sexuality, marriage, and the nature of the human body. The Church's ministry depends upon communicating the truth in love, so as to be able to serve those who come to our parishes and schools. There cannot be compromise on the truth, but there is much that can be done to serve and accompany those struggling with the truth.

Because modern culture has very quickly changed its views of sexuality, the Church appears, in the eyes of many, to be backward or even oppressive in its teaching. This brief document seeks to point to the light and splendor of God's truth, which alone can lead us to true happiness. St. John Paul II summarizes powerfully the goodness of God's plan for creating human beings as male and female:

[We read in Holy Scripture that] from the very beginning, man has been created "male and female" (Gen 1:27). Scripture itself provides the interpretation of this fact: even though man is surrounded by the innumerable creatures of the created world, he realizes that he is alone (cf. Gen 2:20). God intervenes in order to help him escape from this situation of solitude: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). The creation of woman is thus marked from the outset by the principle of help: a help which is not one-sided but mutual. Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are complementary. Womanhood expresses the "human" as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way. When the Book of Genesis speaks of "help," it is not referring merely to acting, but also to being. Womanhood and manhood are complementary not only from the physical and psychological points of view, but also from the ontolog-

ical. It is only through the duality of the “masculine” and the “feminine” that the “human” finds full realization (*Letter to Women*, 1995, 7).

God asks the Church to proclaim the Good News of creation and of redemption, including of human sexuality, as a path to true freedom and happiness. In realizing and accepting our identity as made in the image and likeness of God, as man and woman, we can walk in the way of Christ, a way of healing, integration, fulfillment, and wholeness.

The Archdiocese of Denver offers this document to provide a succinct overview of this teaching, from God’s revelation and the truth of the human person to guide pastoral engagement and to complement policy guidelines. It does not seek to present a comprehensive response to how the Church addresses issues related to sex and gender. Additional resources can be found in the “Resources” appendix.

Acknowledgement

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The Archdiocese has partnered with the Person and Identity Project to provide further resources to personnel implementing the policies outlined in this document. Their website, personandidentity.com, provides resources including responses to FAQs, videos and downloadable material, available at no cost.

Resources

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