

A Transgender Catholic Responds

For some time the Catholic Church quietly discerned on the issue of Transgender persons. Things changed in 2019 beginning with the Congregation for Catholic Education's document, "Male and Female He Created Them". Recently some US Church leaders have taken a more hostile tone.

Transgender persons of all ages, their parents and supportive friends continue to be saddened and disappointed by Catholic publications from some dioceses ([Springfield, IL](#); [Indianapolis, IN](#); and [St. Louis, MO](#)), "guidelines" for how transgender Catholics and transgender children should be treated within our parishes and schools. The Diocese of Detroit has even gone so far as to ban supportive Catholic family and friends of LGBTQ+ persons from assembling anywhere in the diocese. Lifelong Catholics continue to be fired from Church employment, not for performance reasons, but for who they are.

Such documents are hurtful and very harmful. Catholic parents and families worry for the emotional, spiritual, and physical safety of their children within their own parish communities. Many are unfortunately (but understandably) choosing to leave the Church.

"Male and Female He Created Them" states, "The Catholic school should be an educating community in which the human person can express themselves and grow in his or her humanity, in a process of relational dialogue, interacting in a constructive way, exercising tolerance, understanding different points of view and creating trust in an atmosphere of authentic harmony. Such a school is truly an "educating community", a place of differences living together in harmony. The school must respect the family's culture. It must listen carefully to the needs that it finds and the expectations that are directed towards it".

It also states that "in this way, girls and boys are accompanied by a community that teaches them "to overcome their individualism and discover, in the light of faith, their specific vocation to live responsibly in a community with others".

Do our churches and schools ask everyone to "overcome their individualism" when we say 'All Are Welcome'?

Recent documents and policies use words like "pastoral", "understanding", and "compassion", yet place restrictions on parents and families seeking only the well being and safety of the family member. Catholic families are told their children are no longer welcome in our schools, unless they deny their very existence.

The January 2020, the Diocese of Springfield, IL, Pastoral Guide, re "Policy %650 Gender [Identity](#)", offers no acknowledgment of the transgender student or person, within records or verbal communication. In fact the document goes so far as to accuse those parents who accompany their children through a gender transition, of child abuse.

The policy applies to all interactions that the Diocese or her agents have with any persons, whether said person is an employee, volunteer, student, or a general member of the faithful. Violation of the policy by any employee or volunteer may include immediate corrective action, suspension, and possible termination of employment or volunteer status.

Old Testament books such as Leviticus outlined the religious and cultural laws of the time. Foods, traditions, and persons were Clean or Unclean. Those labeled “Unclean” were to be avoided, with severe consequences otherwise. Transgender persons have become today’s “Unclean”.

The apostle Peter says, “you know that is unlawful for a Jewish man to associate with, or visit, a Gentile, but God has shown me that I should not call any person profane or unclean” (Acts 10:28)

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians, 3:28). The apostle Paul understood that the message of Christ was meant to extend far beyond the Jewish people, to all.

In June 2020 the Archdiocese of Indianapolis issued its “Policy and Complementary Norms on Sexual Identity In School [Ministries](#)”. The document is slightly more pastoral in tone, stating that “each of us is a unique child of God, each student’s situation should be viewed independently” and addresses anti-bullying. Somewhat contradictory, it restricts formal record changes, but allows the child’s family to request a different nickname/name be use in an effort to reduce the child’s psychological distress.

Like Springfield however, the Indianapolis policy questions the very existence of transgender persons. It directs school officials, teachers and students to interact with students according to their biological sex at birth. To do otherwise, *“would be uncharitable”* (my italics), as it would be confirming such persons in their mistaken understanding of their identity.

Pope Francis is clear that the gospel requires us to acknowledge the dignity of every human person and demands that we accompany people in their journey, not add suffering by our intolerance. Discernment must be informed by lived human experience, informed by listening. The process of listening helps to understand the discrimination and violence that transgender people suffer because they express their gender identity.

In his June 1 document “Compassion and Challenge” Retiring Archbishop of St. [Louis](#), Robert Carlson first offers compassion and understanding, “if you consider yourself as having a gender identity at odds with your biological sex, here’s the first thing I want you to know: God loves you. He loves you right where you are. He has a plan for you”. He goes on however to condemn transgender existence as establishing “a false identity in place of one’s true identity, and so to deny and contradict one’s own authentic human existence as a male or female body-soul unity. Such an action cannot be consonant with the good of the whole person”.

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” (Ephesians 2:10)

God made Me transgender, I am living God’s plan for me.

In late July the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) urged Congress for financial relief during the Covid-19 pandemic to help tuition-paying families keep their Catholic and other non-government schools open this fall. The USCCB made this interesting comment.

“Catholic schools have provided an enormous public benefit by educating a diversity of Americans from every walk of life, including from every income level, but especially the poor and immigrant communities”. The USCCB also states that “Catholic schools also educate significant numbers of

students who are not Catholic, including children from Protestant, Jewish and Muslim families and from homes where no religion is claimed”.

Christian author Brandon Robertson writes, “It is the strangest thing, isn’t it, that the church which believes that the mission of God is to bring salvation to the world, continues to fight so hard to keep eager, willing individuals outside of the fellowship of faith? Could anyone truly imagine any of the apostles or Jesus himself declaring someone unworthy of following him?”

My Church says my life is *Intrinsically Evil*.

No one chooses to be transgender. Who would choose possible rejection by family, friends, employment, Church, and in many states still, eviction from home or apartment? Who would choose the prospect of bullying, and physical violence?

When I came out as transgender during a confession 5 years ago, confident in knowing that I was no less-good that day, than I was the day before, I said, “Father you can throw me out if you want, but I’m coming right back in, this is MY Church too”. Five years later I am a Eucharistic Minister in my parish. I have been very blessed. My parish clergy, Bishop, my Cardinal, all to whom I have spoken, have been very supportive. Many clergy however are far less so.

There is a conservative belief by some clergy that being transgender is the result of some childhood abuse, either sexually or physically, perhaps neglect, or a product of drug or alcohol abuse. It was one of the first questions I was asked by a local pastor with whom I had lunch, during which he admitted he had minimal previous interaction with anyone transgender. He had been taught that becoming transgender was a way to escape the pain and trauma.

For myself, this could not be further from the truth. There has been no abuse or trauma, no drug or alcohol dependency. Likewise, the hundreds of transgender persons I know reflect every aspect of society. We are doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects, actors, educators, politicians, CEOs, military. We are children, parents and grandparents. The Catholic parents of transgender kids, teens and young adults that I know, love them dearly, and want only the best for their children.

It is true however that rejection of transgender persons, by family and by their faith communities, leads to higher rates of anxiety, depression and suicide. While church statements documents seem to acknowledge this, they continue stress “conformity” over real pastoral care.

The Church wants to put us into the box of *Gender Ideology*, a product of social norms, and social media influences and pressure. The Church says we disavow Church anthropology of male and female and thereby seek to undermine and destroy the family. Gender Ideology has become a convenient way of categorizing the “other”, someone or something not fully understood, yet challenging to personal thought.

Daniel P. Horan, in the National Catholic Reporter, writes:

Often over the course of two millennia, when church teaching has come up against developments about the human person and in the natural sciences, there have been those who rallied to decry such humanistic advances as ‘heretical’, ‘threatening’, ‘unfounded’, or ‘against the natural law’. History has witnessed this in terms of the Catholic Church’s resistance to

recognizing the full humanity of indigenous people, to rejecting the abject immorality of chattel slavery, and to embracing the universal human right of religious liberty, just to name three examples of the church's institutional sinfulness and its slow course to correction.

The phrase 'gender ideology' has become a rallying cry for such discrimination and defense of inexcusably outdated anthropological foundations. The real problematic ideology at work today is the uncritical promotion of 13th pseudo-science and ancient philosophical theories that, while interesting and influential, are no longer sufficient to account for important developments in human knowledge and experience since the Middle Ages. The phrase 'gender ideology' is deployed in Catholic circles to cause grave harm to people already made vulnerable in an unjust society.

Deacon Ray Dever, father of a transgender daughter writes "When I hear pronouncements about an 'ideology of gender' they simply do not ring true for me. What I have found that at the end of the day, what transgender individuals want more than anything else is simply to be able to live their lives as who they are, with the same rights, freedom, and dignity that the rest of us enjoy".

Theologians James and Evelyn Whitehead reflect on "*born in the image of God*". (Gen. 1:27). "It cannot be in our maleness or femaleness that we reflect God, but from our capacities for love and compassion and justice. As we are able to disengage our lives as reflections of God from the cultural constraints of gender, and our eyes open to the extravagant diversity of creation."

"*Male and female God made them.*" (Gen. 1:27). The Whiteheads note, "to reflect only upon the rigid dichotomy of male and female, and of procreation, leaves little space for the extravagant paradoxes throughout Scripture. The revelations given in many scripture events challenges a rigid view of human nature. The life of faith surpasses the bounds of the natural. As we follow the path of Jesus Christ, cultural differences and prejudices begin to fall away. We come to see human nature is not simply biologically determined. Natural is not primarily what we are given, but rather what we are called to become".

Dei Verbum (11-13), the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, discussed how today's scientific and historical findings seem at times to contradict some statements in the Bible. The Council at Vatican II believed that scriptural statements need not be taken literally, because the bible does not set out to teach science or history. The use of sacred scripture is so "'we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, (DV 13) (which cites St. John Chrysostom "In Genesis" 3, 8 (Homily I7, 1): PG 53, 134).

Brandon Robertson again states:

It is a sad reality that throughout its history the church of Jesus Christ has been an often exclusive and damaging body of people. Our failure to see what God has been up to throughout Scripture has led us to reinforce binary way of engaging the world, creating communities that exclude and marginalize the very people God delights in, all done so in the name and under the authority of Jesus Christ.

True inclusion demands that we recognize that only in our diversity do we more perfectly reflect the divinity of our expansive Creator. When we are compelled to declare that someone doesn't

belong, we are dehumanizing ourselves and the one(s) we are excluding. We are attempting to cut off a unique incarnation and manifestation of the beauty of God, simply because we do not agree, do not feel comfortable, or don't know how to interact with such a person. Discomfort is not an excuse to marginalize or exclude, rather it is a sign that we are being called to go deeper, to do the hard work of getting to know another person and to work on our own shadows that predispose us to discriminate. Following Jesus down the path of true inclusion is the most difficult endeavor upon which any human being can embark.

So why do I, other transgender persons, and LGBTQ+ Catholics and their families remain part of our Church? Why do we stay? Faith. It has been a part of us since our Baptism. Our Faith IS our lives, and our lives are a reflection of our faith. It is for those "Building A Bridge", the many priests, sisters, Bishops, and Cardinals, and religious who truly welcome everyone made in the image and likeness of God, want to encounter and to listen, and to understand. It is for those living the mission statement of Fortunate Families who "through accompaniment and bridge-building seek to celebrate and safeguard the dignity of LGBTQ+ children of God".

Bishop Robert Baron asks "Why were you Baptized? That you might become a missionary your whole life long; that you, specifically chosen, might become the vehicle by which God would draw more and more people to himself; that you'd be like Mt. Zion, the true pole of the earth, you'd be like the holy temple, and through you many others will stream to the Lord. THAT'S why you were baptized!"

In a weekly parish reflection by our Deacon Anthony, he relates the story about the famous Italian sculptor Donatello who looked at a large block of marble and saw cracks, flaws, and imperfections. He decided that it was too damaged for him to use. Shortly thereafter the famous sculptor Michelangelo looked at that same block of marble, saw the same cracks, flaws, and imperfections. But his eyes saw it differently, he was able to see the beauty that lay beneath the surface. He took that block and proceeded to carve one of the greatest of all art treasures... the statue of David.

Let us continue to pray for the day that every LGBTQ+ Catholic, be considered an important and valued part of our parish communities, as a reflection of the beauty and diversity of God's vast creativity, treated the same as every other baptized Catholic, with the dignity inherent in every human being.

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