

**Responding to Gender Ideology**  
**Saint Frances Cabrini Parish**  
**September 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021**  
**Father Nathan Reesman**

**Opening Prayer**

**Some Introductory Points: The Necessity of Separating This Topic from Same Sex Attraction**

- Homosexuality is better described in Catholic teaching in this way: men and women who experience same sex attraction
- Transgenderism is better described in Catholic teaching as persons who experience discordance about their sexual identity (more on this below)
- These two conditions or situations, even if often lumped together in popular language, are very different from each other.
- This presentation is going to focus primarily on the topic of sexual identity discordance and very little on same sex attraction
- The Catholic Church and the Scriptures offer an extensive body of teachings and pastoral approaches on the topic of same sex attraction. However, the Church's intentional commentary on sexual identity discordance as a specific modern issue is relatively limited.
- However, if one considers sexual identity discordance under the umbrella of a distorted understanding of the proper relationship of body and soul (Christian anthropology), then it is a topic the Church has dealt with since its earliest days.
- Transgenderism as an ideology that rejects maleness and femaleness is, in some respects, simply a modern name for the same heresies of mind-body dualism that have been with us for centuries that we have always had to correct.
- This presentation is only going to skim the surface of a much larger topic

**Two major parts to this presentation about how to respond to gender ideology:**

- Part I: a response of ideas, concepts, theory, and intellectual arguments
- Part II: a response of proper pastoral care based on the arguments of part I

***Part I: Intellectual Points in Response to Gender Ideology***

**Gender Theory and Its Root Components**

- Multiple facets come together in what is often called "gender theory" which is a school of thought that proposes the fluid nature of sexual identity in persons.

*Losing the forest for the trees: putting biological markers of sex under too close a scrutiny:*

- *One facet* proposes that the age-old binary designation of humans into two categories of "male" and "female" is in reality too imprecise based on sensory, empirical or scientific data alone.

- A close examination of the bodies of humans suggests that there exists a whole range of biological variation on the classical traits of “male” and “female.” This includes markers like hormonal levels, overall physiology, and genital variations.
- Relying merely on biological markers, there is not a binary, “either/ or” category of male and female. Instead there is a whole spectrum or range of possible maleness or femaleness.
- Since the biological range is broad, “male” and “female” are actually more a function of social traditions that we shoe-horn persons into in an imprecise and limited manner.
- Male and female are social conventions, as opposed to a biological spectrum with infinite variations.

*Mind/Body Dualism: the mind is more real than the body*

- Another facet: the mindset or notion that a person’s mind and perception of self has only a limited connection to one’s actual body.
- The body itself must be subjected to the absolute authority of what the mind thinks about it.
- By extension, physical and observable reality is entirely subject to whatever one mind may think about it. If a person believes or thinks someone, or something, or one’s self, is some “thing” then it must be the case that it is that “thing.” If I think I am a giraffe, then I must be a giraffe, and no one may deny what my mind has constructed.

*“Freedom” these days demands there are no biological boundaries to my creativity*

- Another facet: absolute freedom requires the possibility of re-making one’s self according to one’s own preferences, refusing to accept the limitations of what has been decided for us.
- A truly free person is one who: can change one’s name, one’s family, and one’s body if one does not like any of those things.
- Persons view SELVES as well as OTHERS increasingly as a blank canvass, and human freedom for maximum self-actualization should have no limits. Biological sex is one menu option item that I can select as I construct the identity that I want.

*The Elimination of “guard rails”:*

- Related to the above: technology and science have pushed back many of the previously defined limits of what we can do to alter our bodies.
- This generates the notion, or plants the idea in the mind, that I am not bound by biological realities. If I do not like something about my body, I can change it. Prior generations had stronger socially accepted limits on what was/was not possible and those guardrails kept certain behaviors in check.
- The collapse of the common Western Christian social fabric has also eliminated a whole series of behaviors, ideas, or options that were always considered off limits (or scandalous).
- Commonly accepted norms surrounding sexuality, marriage, family, gender acted as guard rails on behavior.

- They were channels that forced people to work through interior conflicts and issues within certain limits. Those rails, those channels have been removed or replaced by new social norms meaning that interior conflicts can now be “solved” by appealing to a wide array of new means that were once off limits.
- This places a serious burden on an individual to invent his or her own set of new boundaries rather than living within a set of “givens.”
- People may now pretend to create their own gender identity because all guardrails or channels that previously made this socially and culturally unthinkable have been removed.

*Tell-all culture: my self-identity relies upon the mass-affirmation of others*

- Another facet: Contemporary sociological wisdom suggests it is unhealthy to hold in any emotions or struggles; all must be “let out.”
- This mentality denies an individual the needed freedom to pass through the roller-coaster ride of internal phases, shifting desires, and questions of self that are natural and are always shifting.
- The current compulsion is to share with the world every experience of internal discord so that others can affirm it, reinforce it, and soften the internal mental struggle of self-discovery.
- This mentality leads us to jump into “categories” and “identities” that we have to reinforce or even construct if they go against what we intuitively know to be “the norm.”
- These struggles are best handled with discretion and with the advice of trusted, internal forum counselors, or of our parents in an open and caring manner, as opposed to being handled through Facebook.
- The public nature of handling them pressures people to land in a “label” or a “category” that is difficult to dislodge once it has been publicly established.

*The Departure from Agricultural and Rural Life*

- Another facet: Vast segments of the “modern West” (Europe, America) no longer practice agriculture in order to survive.
- We study the natural world as eco-tourists, but we have the luxury of not relying on the natural world in any personal agricultural manner for survival.
- This fosters a mentality that allows us to think that natural reproductive laws apply to the rest of creation, but not to us. They are forces to be manipulated at will.
- An agrarian society and culture intuitively understands male, female, reproduction, and the natural cycle of birth and death in a manner that is lost on an urban culture, or one that views the environment merely as a hobby/ for recreational purposes.
- A farmer is not allowed to believe in gender theory, or he will not have a farm.

## **Catholic Church teaching on being created as male and female:**

### *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

#### Section 369:

Man and woman have been *created*, which is to say, *willed* by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. “Being man” and “being woman” is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator.

#### Section 2333

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

#### Section 2335

Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way.

### **Mere biology is not enough: natural law and teleology are needed**

- We must think of ourselves as having a natural, biological, and spiritual end or purpose.
- The term we tend to apply to ideas of natural law and teleology without really realizing we are doing so is the word “normal.”
- We have grown fearful of the word “normal” but it is essential in rightly understanding this situation.
- “Normal” is what is accepted and necessary for the ongoing transmission of life and the survival of the human race through natural (not artificial/ manufactured) means.
- Normal would mean “according to God’s plan.”
  
- Science identifies different systems of the body that exist for the “end” (telos) of maintaining life: respiratory, circulatory, etc.
- Maleness and femaleness are essential to the reproductive system, of which each person only has one-half of the system. It is the only bodily system that is intentionally incomplete in any, one body.
- The reproductive system only makes sense when viewed as a whole: there is a female half and a male half.
- Together, they make life and allow the species to continue.
- Variations on the reproductive system that do not allow life to be created are viewed as abnormal- against the “end” of the system.
- It is a major anomaly on an essential bodily system to view a person as something other than “male” or “female,” or, worse, to try and change them from being one sex to another. This is an attack on a healthy bodily system.

- That is like trying to make a heart into a third lung; doing so would render dysfunctional a circulatory as well as respiratory system and end life.
- We try to get away with this distorted thinking when it comes to sexuality because a single person can get away with not using the reproductive system to do what it is supposed to do- reproduce- in a way that is not possible for tampering with other bodily systems, because each person only has one-half of the reproductive system.
- But such a view only reveals a hyper self-oriented view point of a person- as opposed to one that views a person fundamentally as part of a community, part of a system, part of a human family, rather than a mere isolated individual.
- The destruction (either in concept or in medical practice) of sexual differences between men and women represents the height of individualism to the destruction of the future of the human race which is by nature communal.
- This is why it is not “normal” because it is not at the service of humanity or the future.

*Normative Sexual Identity Markers:*

- To respond to an above transgender theory point about the variations in biological markers that exist in male and female physiology, the vast majority of them are shown to be irrelevant in the face of the fact that:
  - A woman is defined as someone who can receive the male in the sexual act and/or conceive a child to naturally grow inside of her until birth.
  - A man is defined as someone who can engage in the sexual act with a woman and/or can impregnate her.
  - [note: even unintentionally infertile couples can still engage in the sexual act with the desire of creating life if they were able to do so]
  - [men/women/couples who intentionally sterilize themselves or render themselves infertile are already engaging in a similar misunderstanding of the normal ends of the body that give rise to the transgender theory movement]
- Using the above criteria based on what is “normal” and “a telos” as the markers of biological sexual identity (as we have always done until recent years), the number of authentically non-male or female (non-binary) persons is extremely small and rare.
- It is essential that one understand maleness and femaleness relative to their complementary identity roles in the creation of new life.

[more on “normal” below]

**Male and Female as concepts and biological realities are spiritually necessary**

- Male and female within humanity, with two complementary categories of our species, is an essential component of bringing about our union with God who is a communion of complementary persons.
- From beginning to the very end, the Scriptures revolve around some central images or themes that articulate the nature of our union with God. A major image is that of

spousal love. God the bridegroom is shown to be the spouse of humanity/ the Church as the bride.

- It is a union between two binary, distinct entities- humanity with God who is wholly and totally “other” than we are, yet capable of true union with us.
- The erasure of binary sexual identity as male and female in our self-understanding and terminology attacks the root of our ability to understand our union with God.
- Male and Female exist in creation as an essential pointer to our need and ability to enter into a spiritual spousal union with God.

### **Sexual Identity Discordance:**

- If Church teaching about our integral identity as Male and Female is the guide for what is true about our nature, then in the face of gender theory and notions that sexual identity is fluid, we would maintain that there is such a condition as Sexual Identity Discordance.
- Sexual identity discordance is a condition in which a person does not acknowledge his or her God-given sexual identity as a male or a female. There is mental confusion about one’s lived experience of one’s biological sex- a discord between what the body makes plain and what the mind should accept and understand.
- Another similar word to this is a “dysphoria.” It is a psychologically persistent denial of an evident bodily reality.
- A common example of this is anorexia. The mind believes oneself to be over-weight even though the body itself is clearly not. But the mind does not accept or acknowledge the objective reality that the body itself conveys- that it is dangerously thin and underweight.

[BREAK]

## ***Part II: Pastoral and Spiritual Care in Response to Gender Ideology and Discordance***

**Authentic Pastoral Care begins with accepting some fundamental, non-negotiable points that seem at first to be contradictory:**

Point One: Accepting “Male” and “Female”

- The Church maintains that the only pastoral remedy for gender identity conflicts or discordance is to learn to accept one’s place in God’s plan as a male or as a female.
- Males and females each love, share, and build up the world in different and complementary ways.
- One is only going to truly achieve interior peace, joy, and freedom when one accepts the non-negotiable biological, social, and spiritual guardrails/ limits of the reality of “male and female he created them.”
- If one fights these most fundamental truths, one will be miserable without exception.
- This is baseline pastoral care and medicine.

Point Two: “Male” and “Female” does allow for some fluidity- to a degree

- Differing cultures and differing eras do operate on a range of constructs that help a person make sense of, or fit in to, “male” vs “female.” We tend to call these stereotypes.
- A healthy culture, healthy family, healthy person allows for some degree of variety in the stereotypes and resists defining them too rigidly. For example: it would be unhealthy to say a woman should NEVER wear pants or play with trucks, or that a man should NEVER be a nurse.
- However, all cultures do hold to certain limits on the blurring of gender stereotypes for a very important reason: the stereotypes about dress, appearance, duties, roles, etc, are at the service of generativity of new offspring. They are what make people attractive to the other sex.
- The human race persists because cultures maintain limits on what is, and is not, attractive for males and for females.
- Therefore we are unwise to be too permissive about our stereotypes of male and female.
- *Propper pastoral care of gender confusion is going to hold the two above points in careful tension if it is to be effective.*
- *The goal is to help a person recognize that they fit into a binary category of male or female, while acknowledging that sometimes it is a clumsy fit because each person is unique.*

How does one do this? Some critical, further points of pastoral care:

*The gender battle is fundamentally a mental one prior to being a biological one.*

- The roots of gender discordance are heavily mental, rather than physical/ biological/hormonal
- Good data on persons who present rapid onset gender dysphoria (ROGD) is slow to emerge because so much information about it is agenda-driven.
- However, we do know that a very high percentage of persons with ROGD are on the autism spectrum and/ or suffer from Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder.
- In most cases, if these root mental issues are treated, it brings resolution to the more acute gender questions.
- There is no medical test for ROGD.
- If a child presents symptoms of ROGD, and parents patiently but firmly hold the boundary on maintaining their child is not some other sex, then nearly all children outgrow this issue by the end of their teens.
- Conversely, if parents take the route of admitting their child to a “gender clinic,” the children rarely grow out of it.
- Currently if “gender” is mentioned to a counselor in a first visit, they will grab on to that and make that the issue. More helpful is the approach of not initially mentioning it and treating the child/person for their other emotional issues first.

### *The search for acceptance*

- Gender discordance is responded to differently depending upon the age of the person in question.
- For the youngest children, questions or spoken assumptions that they are actually not their biological sex are best handled by gently making light of them, and reminding them it is not true.
- For teens and those into adulthood, one must attempt to understand what is going on behind the questioning and try to encourage them to articulate it.
- For persons passing through puberty and beyond, it is fundamentally about a search for acceptance, meaning, and a proper “fit” into society stereotypes about sex.
- Calmly and patiently giving them the freedom to express their interior questions and conflicts about what it means to be male or female is critical.
- Calmly maintaining that one does not have the option to change one’s sex is also critical.
- Struggles about how one fits into male or female roles have been with us since the Fall from Eden- it makes sense that we struggle.
- What is new is that now we have removed all the accepted guard-rails that used to force us to deal with those struggles in less destructive ways.

### *The lure of group identity and what is “cool” about claiming to be a different gender*

- Gender confusion is described as a “social contagion.” For those approaching or moving through puberty, there is intense social pressure to attain self-acceptance as well as peer acceptance. Claiming to be another gender has become a pathway to “cool” or even hero status in today’s cultural climate.
- In this way the idea of gender discordance spreads among social groups much like a fad.
- Parents and teachers are wise to recognize it for what it is.

### *Parallels Between Transgender Ideology and Cult Behavior*

- Maria Keffler has written an excellent book: *Desist, Detrans, and Detox: Getting Your Child Out of the Gender Cult*. [see references at the end]
- In it she details well the often militant dynamic that overtakes a person who decides to deny their biological gender, setting their loved ones up for a “for me, or against me” set of options for responding to their mental dysphoria.
- It is best understood by seeing the new gender identity mindset and group as a cult that engages in mind control of new members.
- Cult tactics as outlined by Maria Keffler:
  - Identify potential new recruits: people on the margins/low self-esteem/ social victims
  - Draw the recruit in: well-rehearsed rhetoric about gender fluidity and the promise of happiness by breaking out of accepted stereotypes

- Love-bomb the new recruit: shower the new members with adoration, praise, affection, and protection
  - Sell, sell: promote the new ideology from the housetops- literally- rainbow flags, social media, etc
  - Apply Hard Love: if you want to stay in the group/ cult, you must behave certain ways and think in certain ways
  - Require renunciation of loved ones: if you agree with the cult you are good, if you disagree you are bad and are to be cut off. Guilt those who disagree with you- shame them.
  - Introduce and coerce acceptance of core beliefs: “love is love.” “Be who you are.”
  - Permit zero tolerance of criticism, zero tolerance of independent thinking: Cancel them!
- One must understand the cult-like nature of the transgender movement if one is going to keep a loved one out of it, resist it, or rescue them from it.
  - Once they are in, the odds of “outgrowing it” are much smaller.

*Pronouns, Hormones, Surgeries: pursuing “the mirage” of happiness*

- The younger the child/person, the more firmly one can resist at the outset any attempts to play into the directions of changing names, pronouns, cross-dressing, etc.
- The older a person is, the more complex it becomes to establish firm boundaries that one is not going to cross into the realm of make-believe as one deals with a child/loved one with ROGD.
- Maria Keffler’s book offers excellent suggestions for how to navigate this, especially with teens.
- Bright red-line boundaries that must never be crossed have to do with any hormonal or biological modifications to a healthy body. That is bad, unethical medicine.
- Even gestures that seem smaller, like changing pronouns or names, are a slippery slope. One must understand what has been called the **“mirage dynamic”** of ROGD behaviors:
  - A person who experiences gender discordance is sold the idea that if they begin to adopt the behaviors/identity of the other sex, then they will be happy.
  - Often they begin small, but it is never enough, and they keep reaching for the next steps thinking it will bring the relief they are seeking from their mental struggle.
  - Names move to pronouns, to hair, to makeup, to outfits, to hormones, to surgeries.... Because what they are chasing is a mirage. Whenever they think they have reached it, it disappears or moves further out.
  - Ultimately the people who keep pursuing the mirage end up more unhappy than they were before. The suicide rate among those who have attempted to change genders is extremely high relative to the rest of the population.

### *Resist the Temptation to Demonize:*

- When dealing with this topic either on a personal level with a loved one, or when encountering it in the wider culture as an ideology, it is tempting to paint the people caught up in it as evil.
- There is no question that the Devil is behind a lot of what we are dealing with, and there is no question that deliberate advancement of agendas is at work in our cultural onslaught and propaganda campaign.
- However: classic Christian thought is to assume the best intentions of ones opponents until proven otherwise, and of course to pray for them.
- For many people experiencing gender discordance they are trying to work through an internal mental struggle, and they have been sold on a false idea.
- For many therapists, politicians, or “helpers” who are advancing gender ideology, they mistakenly think they are being helpful. Many are panicking. Panicked people do not think clearly, and in the absence of a Christian culture with firm guardrails, people begin to make up any solution they can think of, especially seductive delusions of freedom from age-old ideas.
- Patience, calm, understanding, and clear thinking is needed to counter what we are facing.

### ***Some Final Points:***

#### **Recognizing Violence to Human Dignity**

- It does violence to human dignity/ to the person to willingly mutilate a body in order to attempt to change its biological sex.
- It does violence to persons who experience mental confusion over sexual identity to deny them the right to helpful counseling/therapy that can relieve them of this challenge because authority figures wrongly reinforce the idea that a person might be the wrong sex.
- It does violence to females to advance the claim that a man born a man can now be a woman; doing so denies women their own proper mode of self expression and unique social roles in the world that men do not belong in. Converse is true of doing violence to men.
- It does violence to our fundamental right to the truth of reality to advance the claim that a man is actually a woman and vice versa. We all have the right to acknowledge the truth of the reality around us [I have the right to be able to call something what it actually is]. This is taken from me by transgender ideology as I am forced to create a parallel reality to accommodate the flawed psychology of someone else.

#### **The Cross and “normal”: love means telling the truth**

- What does one do if one does not feel “normal?” The Christian spirituality of the cross, suffering, and resurrection.
- Compassion rightly understood: one day they may ask you why you did not tell them the truth

### **Is it a sin to experience sexual identity discordance?**

- No. Often the interior psychological conflicts that arise over accepting one's biological sex are rooted in difficult experiences or confusion over expectations among the sexes such that one cannot be blamed for the initial thoughts that raise the challenges.

### **Is it a sin to alter one's body as a result of compulsions due to sexual identity discordance?**

- Yes in the sense that doing so is gravely wrong and contrary to human dignity.
- However, if a person's mental state is compromised over the experience of sexual identity discordance, it is possible to suggest their personal responsibility (culpability) for the sin is diminished.
- Sharing in the responsibility for the sin would be any medical or psychological professional that suggested to persons experiencing sexual identity discordance that it would somehow benefit them to alter their bodies in any way to match what exists in their mind.
- Something similar can be said of parents who, hopefully of sound mind and faculties, fail to properly consult Church resources and teachings in the face of social pressures to accept fluid notions of sexual identity.
- Also potentially culpable are lawmakers who exert social pressure on this matter in ways that are contrary to the Church's understanding that people are created male and female.

### **Resources:**

- *Male and Female He Created Them: Towards A Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*, Congregation for Education, Vatican City, 2019.
- Society for Evidenced Based Gender Medicine (SEGM): <https://segm.org>
- Person and Identity Project: <https://personandidentity.com>
- Courage International, *Handbook for Courage and EnCourage Chaplains, Fortieth Anniversary Edition*, specifically the section: "Questions of Sexual Identity and Gender Identity Discordance," pages 81-83. Available here: <https://couragerc.org/2020-handbook/>
- Ryan Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Movement*. Encounter Books, 2018.
- Maria Keffler, *Desist, Detrans, and Detox: Getting Your Child Out of the Gender Cult*. Partners for Ethical Care, 2021.
- Reesman, *In Exile: "Transgenderism Has No Clothes."* <https://exsulare.com/2021/03/09/transgenderism-has-no-clothes/>