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A CRITIQUE OF GENDER IDEOLOGY

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It is common nowadays to meet young people who are confused about their gender identity. To feel like the other gender is very much in fashion; it is the new trending topic. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Gender Identity Development Service reported that it received 1,986 referrals of children in 2016/2017, up from 94 referrals in 2009/2010,[1] making for a relative increase of 2,000%. In Canada, a parent was allowed to register her/his child's sex as "U" (probably for unspecified) so that the child will have the freedom to choose *its* own gender later on.[2] And in the Philippines, 10% of males aged 18–25 years old now identify with the opposite gender.[3] How are we to react to this? How are we to discern the "signs of the times" (see Mt. 16:3) here?

[1]"GIDS Referrals Figures for 2016/17," Gender Identity Development Service. Available at http://gids.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/content_uploads/referral-figures-2016-17.pdf.

[2]"Canadian baby 'first without gender designation' on health card," *BBC News* (July 3, 2017). Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40480386.

[3]E. Valles, *Project Courage Topline Research Results* (Manila: 2018).

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Confusion as a Relatively Recent Phenomenon

Gender identity confusion on this scale is a relatively recent phenomenon. Dr. Edward Furton, Director for Publications at the influential National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia, comments: "The age in which we live contributes to the confusion. The claim that sexual identity is imposed on us by society—and therefore is malleable and subject to choice—is one of the great delusions of our time."[4] The Pontifical Council for the Family explains:

> Starting from the decade between 1960–1970, some theories … hold [sic] not only that generic sexual identity ("gender") is the product of an interaction between the community and the individual, but that this generic identity is independent from personal sexual identity: i.e., that masculine and feminine genders in society are the exclusive product of social factors, with no relation to any truth about the sexual dimension of the person. In this way, any sexual attitude can be justified, including homosexuality, and it is society that ought to change in order to include other genders, together with male and female, in its way of shaping social life.[5]

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church also notes that,

> faced with theories that consider gender identity as merely the cultural and social product of the interaction between the community and the individual, independent of personal sexual identity without any reference to the true meaning of sexuality, the Church does not tire of repeating her teaching: "Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept [their] sexual identity."[6]

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[4]E. Furton, "Confusion about Sex and Gender," *Ethics and Medics* 40:2 (2015): 3.

[5]Pontifical Council for the Family, *Family, Marriage and "De Facto" Unions* (Vatican City: 2000), 8. Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_20001109_de-facto-unions_en.html.

[6]*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004), 224.

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In a nutshell, the issue that developed was the attempt to dissociate sex (as male or female) from gender (the outward expression of our sexuality) in radical fashion. To add to the linguistic confusion even further, sex is now labeled as "assigned gender" as it is only allegedly *assigned* at birth (an idea which sort of ignores all the biological occurrences since conception). It is now commonplace to be a male (sex = "assigned gender") but feel like a female (gender expression = "experienced or expressed gender"). The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explains the situation that has arisen: "In this perspective [of gender ideology], physical difference, termed *sex*, is minimized, while the purely cultural element, termed *gender*, is emphasized to the maximum and held to be primary."[7]

Gender Dysphoria

Psychiatrists use the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (abbreviated as DSM) to classify mental disorders. People who feel that they were born into the wrong body are listed under "gender identity disorder" in DSM 4 (first published in 1994). Things changed with DSM 5, published in 2013, which defines gender dysphoria as

> the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender. Although not all individuals will experience distress as a result of such incongruence, many are distressed if the desired physical interventions by means of hormones and/or surgery are not available.[8]

The diagnosis of gender dysphoria in adolescents and adults as such involves a difference between one's experienced/expressed gender and

[7]Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World" (Rome: 2004), n. 2.

[8]American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* 5th ed. (Arlington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 451. Hereafter referred to as DSM-5.

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assigned gender as well as significant distress or problems functioning.[9] It is regarded as dysfunctional if it lasts for at least six months and is determined by at least two of the following:

- a marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics;[10]
- a strong desire to be rid of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics;
- a strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender;
- a strong desire to be of the other gender;
- a strong desire to be treated as the other gender; and
- a strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender.

The diagnosis of gender dysphoria in children, according to DSM 5, involves at least six of the following along with an associated significant distress or impairment in function, with all these lasting for at least six months:

- a strong desire to be of the other gender or an insistence that one is the other gender;
- a strong preference for wearing clothes typical of the opposite gender;

[9]American Psychiatric Association, "What Is Gender Dysphoria?" Available at https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria.

[10]Primary sexual characteristics are present from birth (such as testes and penis in the male and vagina, uterus, and ovaries in the female). Secondary sexual characteristics emerge at puberty (such as increased muscular mass, deepening of the voice, and facial hair in males and enlargement of breasts in females).

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- a strong preference for cross-gender roles in make-believe play or fantasy play;
- a strong preference for the toys, games, or activities stereotypically used or engaged in by the other gender;
- a strong preference for playmates of the other gender;
- a strong rejection of toys, games, and activities typical of one's assigned gender;
- a strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy; and
- a strong desire for the physical sex characteristics that match one's experienced gender.

There is a significant change then between DSM 4 (where we find "gender identity disorder") and DSM 5 (where it is now called "gender dysphoria"). Dr. Paul Hruz, an associate professor at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri, describes what happened:

> With the publication of the fifth edition of this manual (DSM-5) in 2013, the diagnosis of "gender identity disorder" transitioned to "gender dysphoria," with the assertion that gender-sex discordance is a normal manifestation of human diversity. Treatment aims accordingly shifted to the patient's level of "dis-ease," or negative feelings, about the appearance of his or her body. Turning the understanding of the relationship between wellness and disease on its head, the mind is now considered healthy and the body diseased. In this light, the simplest solution to the problem is to alter the body to conform to mental belief.[11]

Dr. Edward Furton comments:

> Although the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the standard source for describing mental disease, continues to list this condition as a psychological dysfunction, it is no longer explained as a failure to identify with one's given sex, but rather as a feeling of incongruence between physical sex and "gender identity." The claim

[11]P. Hruz, "The Use of Cross-Sex Steroids in the Treatment of Gender Dysphoria," *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 17:4 (2017): 661–671, here at 664.

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> that one's psychological idea of sexual self does not match one's physical body has been given the name "gender dysphoria."[12]

Such growing confusion among the youth about their gender identity is due largely to the widespread diffusion of gender ideology, of which Pope Francis himself is a strong critic. It is to his teaching that we now turn.

Pope Francis: A Vocal Critic of Gender Ideology

When Francis visited the Philippines in 2015, he said, "Let us be on guard against colonization by new ideologies. There are forms of ideological colonization which are out to destroy the family."[13] He did not elaborate further, yet these words came as a strong warning seeing that the Philippines had already experienced over 400 years of harsh and unjust colonization. In a later address to the Polish bishops, the Pope explained his concern:

> In Europe, America, Latin America, Africa, and in some countries of Asia, there are genuine forms of ideological colonization taking place. And one of these—I will call it clearly by its name—is [the ideology of] "gender." Today children—children!—are taught in school that everyone can choose his or her sex. Why are they teaching this? Because the books are provided by the persons and institutions that give you money. These forms of ideological colonization are also supported by influential countries. And this [is] terrible![14]

Francis also referred to the problem in *Amoris Laetitia:*

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[12]See Furton, "Confusion about Sex and Gender," 3.

[13]Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Meeting with Families (Manila, Philippines: January 16, 2015). Available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150116_srilanka-filippine-incontro-famiglie.html.

[14]Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Meeting with the Polish Bishops (Kraków, Poland: July 27, 2016). Available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/july/documents/papa-francesco_20160727_polonia-vescovi.html.

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> Yet another challenge is posed by the various forms of an ideology of gender that "denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time." It is a source of concern that some ideologies of this sort, which seek to respond to what are at times understandable aspirations, manage to assert themselves as absolute and unquestionable, even dictating how children should be raised. It needs to be emphasized that "biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated."[15]

The way we deal with our bodies as created entities is a living reflection of how we relate to our Creator. Francis writes in *Laudato Si'*, his encyclical on care for creation, that

> it is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. 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.[16]

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[15]Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016), 56. Available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

[16]Francis, *Laudato Si'* (May 24, 2015), 155. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

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Our bodies are created and are "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). We cannot just do whatever we wish with them. That is why St. Paul exhorts as such: "Avoid immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the immoral person sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18).

Effects of Ideological Colonization

The new colonization through gender ideology is easily seen in countries like the Philippines. In some "Flowers of May" processions in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for instance, a large number of boys can be seen dressed up as "girls." Some statistics would be helpful indeed, but there is a serious shortage of research and data here. The only study I have seen was work done for a master's thesis by a member of Courage International. He surveyed 357 young people in Manila (aged 18–25 years old) and found that 10% of males and 4% of females identified themselves with the opposite gender and, hence, are "dysphoric." This is obviously not a strict psychological diagnosis (which is hard to come by in the Philippines as there are so few psychiatrists trained in this specific area and most of the population cannot afford their rates), yet these figures are astonishingly high nevertheless considering that the upper estimate for the prevalence of transgender people in the U.S. population is only 0.4%.[17] This means that for every transgender person in the United States there are 15 youths in the Philippines who identify with the opposite gender. Yet the U.S. (along with other countries) is partly responsible for exporting distorted gender views to other nations, and here we can see the drastic consequences of such.

[17]In DSM-5, birth rates of gender dysphoria are cited as ranging from 0.005% to 0.014% for males and from 0.002% to 0.003% for females (see crashchaoscats, "DSM-V Gender Dysphoria." Available at https://crashchaoscats.wordpress.com/2014/04/10/dsm-v-gender-dysphoria/). The prevalence rate in adults is different.

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Severing Gender from Sex

Severing gender from sex is akin to cutting the boat "free" from its anchor. Surely one recognizes that it is not prudent to give *carte blanche* to sexual identity expression in the youth—is such really a step toward freedom or is it not rather pushing the youth into slavery? Gender ideology tends to promote the idea that one can choose one's gender and hence one's sexual orientation and behavior thereafter. The grave concern in not calling out its dangers as such is that many young people who are often exploring their sexual identity may be swept along by it. In the aforementioned Courage survey, 9% of males in Manila expressed same sex attraction, a rate which is much higher than that of the U.S. and U.K. (approximately 3%), while 16% of the respondents (both male and female combined) expressed bisexuality.

Enshrined in Laws

There are moves to enshrine support for gender confusion in law, such as the so-called "Anti-Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Discrimination Act" which bluntly states that sexual orientation

> refers to the direction of emotional, sexual attraction, or conduct towards people of the same sex (homosexual orientation) or towards people of both sexes (bisexual orientation), or towards people of the opposite sex (heterosexual orientation) or to the absence of sexual attraction (asexual orientation).…[18]

The bill and its proponents are rather blasé about opening the Pandora's box of unbridled sexual expression.

[18]House of Representatives, *SOGIE Equality Act*, House Bill No. 4982 (September 20, 2017), sec. 3.i. Available at http://www.congress.gov.ph/legisdocs/third_17/HBT4982.pdf.

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One of the many consequences of such a *laissez faire* attitude to sexual behavior is the on-going HIV[19] (and AIDS[20]) epidemic in the Philippines. Lawmakers would be shocked to discover that of the 33 new cases of HIV diagnosed every day, 29 of these occur with males having sex with other males, with around one third of them being 15–24 years old.[21] The last thing young people need, therefore, are confusing messages about sexual identity and expression! Those proposing such laws and spreading confusion have "HIV infected blood on their hands."

Feelings: The New Golden Calf

I also find it somewhat surprising when the medical and psychiatric professions no longer seem to question the following ideology (or pseudo-science): that feelings alone can override, in a way that is unquestionable, hard biological data such as when an individual who is genetically, anatomically, physically, and physiologically male announces that he feels like a woman (or vice versa). Feelings are made the equivalent of a modern-day golden calf that is to be idolized:

> With that, the Lord said to Moses … "They have soon turned aside from the way I pointed out to them, making for themselves a molten calf and worshiping it, sacrificing to it and crying out, 'This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!' I see how stiff-necked [these] people are," continued the LORD to Moses. (Ex. 32:7–9)

[19]HIV as we know is an abbreviation for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus which is a type of virus called a retrovirus. There is no cure (at the time of this writing) once a person is infected. HIV is the virus that can eventually cause AIDS.

[20]AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome and is the potential result of HIV infection acquired through various modes of transmission. The immune system of the infected person becomes deficient (immunodeficiency) and weak, giving rise to a plethora of diseases (syndrome).

[21]Department of Health-Epidemiology Bureau, *HIV/AIDS & ART Registry of the Philippines* (June 2018). See www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/publication/EB_HIV_June_AIDSreg2018.pdf.

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Feelings *are* important, and they do enter into the moral judgment of a person, yet a human being is not just a big bag of feelings.

Sex Change

Some may propose a "sex change" as one potential means of solving the tension of actual vs. felt gender identity. Yet proponents of sex change therapy might not be so enthusiastic if they were more aware of the actual steps involved. The process depends on the age of the person undergoing it; in its most radical form, a pre-pubertal child is given very powerful puberty-suppressing drugs followed by sex hormones and later on by mutilating surgery.[22] This is what sex change surgery, more often known technically as "sex reassignment surgery" (SRS), is—a form of mutilation.[23] It is one of the rare instances when a surgeon will operate and remove perfectly normal and functioning tissue. In fact, the title "sex change" is a misnomer as it is biologically impossible to change one's sex. As the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia clearly underlines, we

> are either male or female persons, and nothing can change that. A person can mutilate his or her genitals, but cannot change his or her sex. Changing one's sex is fundamentally impossible; these procedures are fundamentally acts of mutilation.[24]

[22]After thoroughly reviewing the available evidence, Hruz et al. conclude that this approach is "experimental" and not prudent. See P. Hruz, L. Mayer, & P. McHugh, "Growing Pains: Problems with Puberty Suppression in Treating Gender Dysphoria," *The New Atlantis* (Spring 2017). Available at https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/growing-pains.

[23]For a more detailed discussion as to whether or not sex reassignment surgery involves mutilation, see D. Jones, "Gender Reassignment Surgery: A Catholic Bioethical Analysis," *Theological Studies* 79:2 (2018): 314–338.

[24]National Catholic Bioethics Center, "FAQ on Gender Identity Disorder and 'Sex Change' Operations." Available at https://www.ncbcenter.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions/gender-identity-disorder-and-sex-change-operations/.

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The patient thus remains male or female; all that can be construed or constructed is a poor cosmetic and external imitation of a woman or man.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* understands such mutilations to be immoral: "Except when performed for strictly therapeutic medical reasons, directly intended amputations, mutilations, and sterilizations performed on innocent persons are against the moral law."[25] In the same light, Dr. Paul McHugh, who served as psychiatrist-in-chief at the Johns Hopkins Hospital for more than two decades and was one of the first to raise concerns about transgender approaches that rely on hormones and surgeries, concluded that "to provide a surgical alteration to the body of these unfortunate people was to collaborate with a mental disorder rather than to treat it."[26]

Summary Points

We may thus summarize with some practical points as follows:

1. Our sexuality—to be male or female—is a great gift. Young people need to learn how to express their sexuality in the best way through healthy and life-giving means.

2. The ideology of gender is a great source of confusion for young people today. It does them a disservice by cutting apart the intrinsic connection between their biological sex and its outward expression in their gender. It is a view and ideology that can produce fragmentation in the human person.

[25] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 2297. Available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

[26] T. Pacholczyk, "Changing My Body to 'Match' My 'Identity'?" *Making Sense of Bioethics* (July 2015). Available at https://www.ncbcenter.org/files/5714/6902/2319/MSOB121_Changing_My_Body_To_Match_My_Identity.pdf.

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3. The ability to choose one's gender often gives free rein to any sexual behavior whatsoever. This brings catastrophic consequences as can be seen with the HIV epidemic in the Philippines, which is driven largely by males having sex with other males.

4. The Catholic vision is a unitive one in that our gender is connected to our biological sex. Our bodies were created by God and we should love and respect them in our being male and female.

5. Young people should live with purity of heart and not fall into unbridled curiosity in the area of sexual behavior.

6. We also believe that young people have a duty and a mission not only to spread the truth about human sexuality by their word and good example but also to counteract the confusion caused by gender ideology. By being good examples, they can help prevent many other youths from being confused about these issues.

Conclusion

While more research into the exact nature of clinical gender dysphoria is still needed, we can already see that the vast majority of gender-confused young people, especially in countries like the Philippines, need clearer guidance in the meantime to enable them to traverse the choppy ocean of sexual maturation during their adolescent years. The real danger is that young people, impressionable as they are, are being given a confusing message about gender and sexuality. They are being bombarded with confusing messages that put their healthy growth in correct sexual identity at risk of being shipwrecked. Indeed, the aggressive marketing and promotion of gender identity confusion is a "sign of the times" (Mt. 16:3), and there is an overwhelming pressure to conform to this gender ideology for fear of being accused of "hate speech" and of being labelled as "transphobic" or "homophobic."

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We need to ensure, then, that we do not get swept along in the hype amid all the celebrations of gender diversity. Just like the little boy in Hans Christian Andersen's tale "The Emperor's New Clothes," the boy who did not just go along with the celebratory flow and cheering of the crowd but was able to point out the truth that the Emperor did not have the new clothes on, that he was actually naked, we must point out the deception propagated and generated by gender ideology.

In uncovering both the reality and concomitant confusion of gender ideology, we must not only guide the youth but also reassure parents. We feel sorry for those who are now told, for example, that they must support the feeling of their young boy who feels like he is a girl. A child should not be allowed to put on a cape and jump out the window just because he feels like Superman.

In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, all were asleep (see Mt. 25:1–13) and would have stayed that way but for an unknown and unnamed character in the Gospel—the voice crying out at midnight (Mt. 25:6). Our baptism calls us to exercise the prophetic task and to be that voice that is crying out when all seem to be sleeping. As such, the growing trend of gender dysphoria should not be a cause for euphoria but rather a cause for concern; indeed, the fad surrounding gender identity and the increasing diffusion of gender ideology are leading many young and impressionable people to sexual identity confusion. We should thus resist attempts that force us to jump onto this ideological bandwagon; we should "stay awake" (Mt. 25:13) and be vigilant as the Lord asks of us.

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