



## The Body-Soul Unity of the Human Person

***“God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”***

*(Gen 1:27)*

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***September 29, 2023 / Feast of the Archangels***

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The influence of gender ideology has become pervasive in contemporary society. As a result, many of the faithful and those who serve in our ministries have raised questions around the complex and sensitive topics of gender, sexual identity, and the nature of the human person. In light of recent guidance from the Church and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and in keeping with our pastoral responsibility to instruct the faithful, we seek with this pastoral letter to provide clarity and resources with regard to the teaching of the Catholic Church concerning the nature of the human person.

Pope Francis has called gender ideology “one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations.”<sup>1</sup> By “ideological colonization,” Pope Francis means that there are powerful cultural influences emerging in various forms of media including publishing, social media, and other influential content which exert tremendous influence on the culture. Gender ideology denies certain fundamental aspects of human existence, such as male-female sexual difference, the reciprocal complementarity of man and woman, and the essential unity of body and soul in the human person. Gender ideology is, in many important respects, radically opposed to a sound understanding of human nature, leading to forms of cultural influence, especially via education and legislation, that promote a notion of personal identity which is left to the choice of the individual and that deny the anthropological basis of the family as founded on the biological difference between male and female.<sup>2</sup> It is thus opposed to reason, to science, and to a Christian view of the human person.

Throughout her history, the Catholic Church has opposed notions of dualism<sup>3</sup> that posit the body and soul as separate, non-integrated entities. The body is an integral and indispensable aspect of what it means to be a

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253845/pope-francis-gender-ideology-is-one-of-the-most-dangerous-ideological-colonizations-today>.

<sup>2</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *‘Male and Female He Created Them’: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*, 2 (2019).

<sup>3</sup> USCCB Committee on Doctrine, *Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body*, 4 (March 20, 2023).

human person. The body and soul come into existence together, in an individual human being at the time of conception. From the beginning of his or her existence, the human person has a body that is sexually differentiated as male or female.<sup>4</sup> “‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God.”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, one can never be said to be in the “wrong” body.<sup>6</sup> “For this reason,” the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, “man may not despise his bodily life. Rather, he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.”<sup>7</sup> Male-female sexual difference and complementarity are also essential to a Christian understanding of marital conjugal union, which is itself an image of Trinitarian communion. Eliminating this difference would diminish in man and woman part of what it means to bear God’s image and likeness. In addition, it would do away with the very basis of the family, the “first vital cell of society.”<sup>8</sup> Doing so would be an offense against human dignity and a social injustice.

Many faithful Catholics demonstrate solidarity with those suffering from gender dysphoria, unjust discrimination, or other questions related to gender identity and sincerely desire to respond in love to their sisters and brothers. The Church is called to do as Jesus did, to accompany in a spirit of solidarity those marginalized and suffering while affirming the beauty and truth of God’s creation. “Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity.... Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell.”<sup>9</sup> Compassion that does not include both truth and charity is a misplaced compassion. Support for those experiencing gender dysphoria must be characterized by an active concern for genuine Christian charity and the truth about the human person. It is, in fact, the truth about the dignity of each person which demands that no one should suffer bullying, violence, insults, or unjust discrimination.<sup>10</sup>

To those experiencing gender dysphoria, we wish to reaffirm that God knows us, loves *each* of us, and desires our flourishing. Jesus reminds us, “I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10) Our lives, even our very identity can seem to us at times to be a mystery. They can be a source of confusion, perhaps even anguish and suffering. Know that your life is not a mystery to God, Who has counted every hair on your head (Luke 12:7), Who created your innermost being, and Who knit you together in your mother’s womb (Psalm 139). In taking on a bodily human nature, Jesus reveals the goodness of our created bodies and the closeness of God to each one of us. He is not far off or indifferent to our questioning, our challenges, or our sufferings. He comes to meet us in them and to reveal to us the depth of his love and mercy. The Second Vatican Council declared that “only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.”<sup>11</sup> This is a way of saying that, in becoming one of us, Jesus not only reveals God to us, but reveals *us* to us. Our identity is not something we invent or create for ourselves. Your most fundamental identity is that of a beloved child of God. Recognize that the desire to understand who you are is a desire to know yourself as created, known, and loved by God. The Church, for her part, desires to listen and to walk with you as you come to understand and accept the totality of who God made you to be.

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<sup>4</sup> While there are a small percentage of individuals affected by disorders of sexual development or sexual ambiguity, their biological sex may be identifiable through genetic techniques or other medical means, albeit with some difficulty.

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 369.

<sup>6</sup> Committee on Doctrine, *Doctrinal Note*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 14 (1965). Quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 364.

<sup>8</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 211 (2004).

<sup>9</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, 3 (2009).

<sup>10</sup> *Male and Female He Created Them*, 16 (2019.)

<sup>11</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

After listening and dialogue, both the Holy See and the USCCB, as well as a number of other Catholic dioceses, have offered guidance regarding the complexities of sexual identity issues as they relate to Church teaching, Catholic healthcare, Catholic education, and the accompaniment of those suffering from gender dysphoria. Some of this guidance is referenced below. The complexities and moral implications of alterations to the human body are treated extensively in the [Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body](#) issued by the USCCB Committee on Doctrine on March 20, 2023. A link to the document is included here as a resource. The *Doctrinal Note* affirms the fundamental order of the human person as a unity of body and soul, including the sexual difference inscribed in the body. Great harm can be done in situations where medical procedures and treatments fail to respect the fundamental created order of the human person. We especially encourage physicians and healthcare workers, those considering medical treatments for gender dysphoria, and anyone caring for people suffering from gender dysphoria to carefully consider the information contained in the *Doctrinal Note*. May our Christian witness and our care for those experiencing real suffering be a sign of our discipleship as we joyfully witness to the healing power of Christ.

Given here are selected resources intended to help to deepen an understanding of the Catholic Church’s teaching on questions relating to sexual identity and gender dysphoria. To those who carry out our ministries, we invite you to familiarize yourselves with the Church’s teaching in order to accompany those we serve in love and truth. Let us continue to lovingly propose to everyone the deepest truth about the human person as revealed by Jesus Christ, that, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary.”<sup>12</sup>



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Most Rev. Michael C. Barber, S.J.  
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## Related Resources

- 1.) *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995). Paragraphs [355-384](#) & [2331-2336](#).
- 2.) [Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body](#) (USCCB, 2023).
- 3.) [Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education](#) (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2019)
- 4.) [“Pope Francis: Gender ideology is ‘one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations’ today”](#) (Catholic News Agency, March 11, 2023).
- 5.) Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation [Amoris Laetitia](#) (Pope Francis, 2016). Nos. 56, 285-286.
- 6.) [“A Catechesis on the Human Person and Gender Ideology”](#) (Most Rev. Michael F. Burbidge, Diocese of Arlington, 2021).

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<sup>12</sup> Homily for the inauguration of the papacy of Benedict XVI, (April 24, 2005).