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## Gender Theory: Does a Secular Response Have to Be the Only Response?



▲ Fr. Javier Bustos.

By Fr. Javier Bustos

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee recently published the “Catechesis and Policy Concerning Gender Theory.” This document provides guidance in applying the Church’s moral teachings regarding the challenges presented by “Gender Theory.” It is an operational policy that helps Catholic parishes, schools and institutions limit the influence and pervasiveness of “Gender Theory.” It does not address the way we minister to those with gender dysphoria, nor does it present a ministerial road map for parishes and schools.

The implementation of this policy does not take away the challenge of assisting parents of children and teenagers in their struggles with gender dysphoria, of listening to the difficulties some ministers have in providing proper spiritual guidance and of helping them experience the closeness, mercy and tenderness of God the Father.

In 2016, Pope Francis described some of “the problems families face in raising children.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 50) Among those the Holy Father identified was the increasing trend of belief in “Gender Theory” or “Gender Ideology” that is being promoted as truth by some groups in our society.

“Gender Theory” is contrary to our Catholic faith and the Christian understanding of the human person. In fact, we believe that “by creating the human being man and woman, God gives personal identity equally to one and the other. Each of them, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity.” (CCC, 2393)

Pope Francis wrote: “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.”

He continued, “This ideology leads to educational programs 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.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 56)

“Gender Theory” promotes an understanding of gender as a non-binary or fluid reality that could be separated from biological sex. In this regard, the Holy Father wrote: “It needs to be emphasized that biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 56)

For the proponent of “Gender Theory,” gender is a social construct; something that is assigned by others. Therefore, the “Gender Theorist” advocates for a “free” choosing of his or her own gender separated from biology.

Instead, Pope Francis teaches us: “Let us not fall into the sin of trying to replace the Creator. We are creatures, and not omnipotent. Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 56)

In this same line of thought, Pope Francis notes in another document that 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.” (*Laudato Si*, 155)

Currently, “Gender Theory” is found in very concrete scenarios of our daily lives: in public schools, throughout media, at work and in our legislature. As we face the mission of properly ministering to transgender individuals, we ask ourselves: Is “Gender Theory” the only vision or response? Are we, as Catholics, obligated to use this secular vision of “Gender Theory”?

Or, as Catholics, can the Church establish her own vision in ministering to transgender individuals true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

In a recent interview, Pope Francis was asked what is the proper response to LGBTQ Catholics? He stated, “God is Father and he does not disown any of his children ... and the style of God is closeness, mercy and tenderness. Along this path you will find God.”



The Holy Father wrote: “The Church is a mother and calls together all her children. ... Take for example the parable of those invited to the feast: ‘the just, the sinners, the rich and the poor, etc.’ (Matthew 22:1-15; Luke 14:15-24) A ‘selective’ Church, one of ‘pure blood,’ is not Holy Mother Church, but rather a sect.” (NCR, May 9, 2022)

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee has embarked on a vast consultation to produce pastoral guidelines on ministering to transgender people based upon our Catholic faith and

Gospel values, instead of the dictate of a secular culture.

The fact remains that we believe human sexuality involves the whole person (social, emotional, spiritual and biological), and that belief should not be an impediment but rather a means to ministering to transgender individuals.

The Church always upholds the dignity of all persons and teaches that they be treated with respect, love and compassion.

## Statements of Support

**Carolyn A. Laabs, Ph.D., M.A., A.P.R.N.,  
family nurse practitioner**

Embracing these truths is precisely what the Milwaukee archdiocesan document seeks to help us to do. It is especially helpful to health care professionals from whom persons suffering from gender dysphoria who, in their vulnerability, seek caring, healing and truthfulness. Patients place their trust in us and it is from charity that we speak the truth. Therefore, we respectfully say no to prescribing powerful drugs and performing mutilating surgeries not meant for their bodies and we do not encourage social or behavioral modifications inconsistent with biological sex. Instead, we direct patients to ministers and counselors who can care for them in a manner that promotes the true good of the human person as a child of God. For to “defend the truth, to articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it in life are exacting and indispensable forms of charity.” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 1) In so doing not only can the truth set our patients free but it can set ourselves free as well. (John 8:32)

**Fr. Jacob A. Strand, S.T.D., Pastor,  
Ad Hoc committee member**

The powerful influence of the transgender movement deeply worries my parishioners, who are concerned that their children and grandchildren will be indoctrinated by lies about the human person. They know that the stakes are high: acquiesce or be labeled a bigot and canceled from society.

Parishioners hear about things like gender reassignment surgeries and puberty blockers. They know these things are not right, but they struggle to articulate a good response. Looking around for guidance, they hear only a confusing cacophony of conflicting voices.

What they desire is a clear and loving articulation of the truth. And now they have it in the Archdiocesan Catechesis and Policy Concerning Gender Theory. By speaking the truth about the human person in love, this document answers many prayers. Furthermore, it has renewed confidence in the Church as “the pillar and foundation of truth.” (1 Tm 3:15) When the world is lost, this teaching tool has reminded Catholics that they can look to the Church for direction. And the Church will guide them to the fullness of truth, Jesus Christ, who is “the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (Heb 13:8)

**Richard J. Fehring, Ph.D., RN, F.A.A.N.,  
professor emeritus, Marquette University**

Asking students and their parents to have their children dress, act and use names according to their biological sex makes common sense and provides order for the school settings. These policies protect all students, faculty and families in the Catholic institutions in the archdiocese, including students who feel that they are a person opposite to their biological sex. A biological boy cannot become a girl (or a girl become a boy) just by feeling so and taking powerful body destructive hormones or by body destructive surgery. To affirm a child’s transition would be to affirm a lie of the body—no less if a healthcare professional, teacher or clergy would affirm that a person with anorexia is too fat. Gender dysphoria is a mental health disorder, but affirming a disorder is not being compassionate, just the opposite.

**The full text of these statements can be found online at <https://www.archmil.org/News/Gender-Theory>.**