

13 August 2017

XIX Sunday of the Year A

Sooner or later all of us will be confronted with it. Each one of us will have to deal with it in a manner that reflects our beliefs as Catholics and shows our charity and compassion for those who suffer from it. The topic is so new and yet is gaining more and more attention in the news media, from the authorities in schools and in government and the medical field.

It is not as uncommon or unmentioned as it once was.

What am I referring to? The technical term for it is transgender dysphoria. Some simply call it “sex change” or “gender transformation”. Dysphoria means the state of being unhappy or unwell. A person who wants to be or identify with the opposite sex or gender is unhappy with the gender that they were created as.

At the Conference for Priests that I attended recently, put on by the Dominican Fathers, one of the priest speakers was a molecular biologist. He spoke on the topic of gender dysphoria, and I was very interested in hearing what he had to say. Basically, what Fr Nicanor told us was that since this is such a new field, very little has been written about it in terms of moral theology, or even scientific research. He said that at present, there is much discussion going on among the experts in their various disciplines as to the causes, the treatments, the analyses of the condition.

What he did offer though, and I found it most helpful was this: there are many different varieties of gender dysphoria. Some of those who suffer this condition want to change their gender by undergoing surgery and hormone treatments. Some just want to identify with the opposite sex. Some are homosexual, some are not. He pointed out that 70% of those who undergo surgery and or hormone therapy experience what he called “transregret” after the treatments are over. In other words, most of them are no happier after their “transformation” than they were before. That is why, in his opinion, it is much more helpful to try to treat these people for the underlying

reasons for their dysphoria. Of course, I am simplifying Father's presentation, but I think all of us should be very much aware of the complexities involved in the issue. Certainly a person with transgender dysphoria is deserving of our compassion and charity. This may be very difficult if the person has become an activist or politicized their position. But we must always see beneath the surface the anger, the confusion or the unhappiness that fuels their desire to be of the opposite gender.

Pope Francis has spoken about this issue on several occasions. He has not issued any formal teaching on it, but has expressed his opinion. Speaking to the Bishops of Poland at World Youth Day, the Pope said the “gender theory” “that everyone can choose their own sex” is “the exact opposite of God's creation”. Most interestingly, he said that there were powerful institutions which are funding the spread of “gender theory” in schools. He said that this funding was being given by very influential countries in a form of “ideological colonization”, which he deplored as terrible. In other words, some countries use financial pressure to force other countries to adopt policies that favor gender theory. Some countries are now proposing that a child has the right to change their gender even without their parents' approval. After what happened in the case of Charlie Gard, where the British courts upheld the position of the hospital over the rights of his parents to bring their son to the US for treatment, or even home to die, it is not unbelievable that some governments are willing to overrule parental rights of their child's life.

Pope Francis also said, “Today, children are taught this at school: that everyone can choose their own sex. And why do they teach this? Because the books come from those people and institutions who give money. God created man and woman: God created the world like this and we are doing the exact opposite.”

As school year approaches, (sorry kids), I ask parents to be particularly alert to what is presented in the government schools on this topic. Speak to your children if there is a transgender student

in their class or school. Find out what bathrooms those students are using, and do not hesitate to register your concerns if you have them.