

Boy, girl or 'theyby': The rise of 'genderless' children



Right now, God-willing, I'm about 11 weeks shy of giving birth to my second child.

It's an exciting, nerve-wracking, wondrous time, all wrapped up into one. Like most expectant parents, the one question my husband and I have gotten the most, by far, is whether or not we know the gender of our baby. My answer is always insufficient for the curious-minded. This time around, like we did for our son, we have chosen not to find out if our baby is a boy or a girl. This was not an easy decision. For Joseph, I actually carried around an envelope in my purse from the sonographer that indicated gender – just in case I had a moment of weakness and had to know (yes, I actually did this). I never peeked, though, so I was none the wiser until May 11, when my husband whispered in my ear that we had a son. It was a moment I will never forget. So we're doing it all over again this time – though without the envelope. With a toddler, who has time to obsess over envelopes anyway?

I found myself thinking about this experience when I read a recent news story about a baby who is being raised without a known gender. The baby is 11 months old, and only a select inner-circle knows whether the good Lord made him or her male or female. The name for babies like this? "Theybies." There's also a Facebook group devoted to this philosophy called Theyby Parenting: Gender Open Parenting.

The whole thing brings to mind a column I wrote in July 2017 highlighting the choice that the Associated Press had made in

introducing the “singular they” for those who do not use “gendered pronouns.” This is a real-life example, and Sparrow, the little one in the news story, is just one of a growing number of kids to be raised without a known gender.

“We are in no way prohibiting Sparrow from having a gender, and we’re not forcing them to be one gender or another,” said the baby’s mother, Ari Dennis.

The interviewer then poses the question: “Now what if Sparrow says to you in the coming years: Am I a boy or a girl?”

Replies Dennis, “I would tell them that they’re the only one who gets to decide that, that I can’t know that. Well, do you feel like a boy? Do you feel like a girl?”

The whole thing is enough to make one’s head spin. At a very base level, especially being a woman in the workforce, I can almost understand Dennis’ motivation. She doesn’t want her child to be constrained and influenced by the gender stereotypes dictated by flawed societal norms. She wants her child to be free to be who he or she is.

But the tragedy is that he or she is a beautiful child of God, made in his image and likeness, and that he created him or her for a purpose. “God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female, he created them” (Gn 1:27). Gender is not a feeling; it’s not a choice. Gender is a gift straight from God, and we shouldn’t pretend that we know better.

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