

Gender ideologies and the need for Christian anthropology



Societal talk about gender identity and gender affirming care fills our news feeds. It concerns me especially when these refer to children. Our society may benefit from an understanding of Christian anthropology.

Videos from Boston Children's Hospital promote gender-affirming surgeries on children as young as 15 and hormone therapy on children as young as three. One professional even said some kids know from the minute they were born what gender they identify as. Well, that's astounding! Babies only want love and food, so I'm pretty sure they don't know or care about their gender as infants.

Parents come to these medical professionals saying their child refuses to get a haircut, or a boy plays with dolls and a girl plays with trucks. These are signs, say the professionals, that the child may be identifying as another gender. Why is there such rigidity with gender stereotypes in the culture? As a child, I played with both dolls and trucks. I enjoyed dressing up in my mom and dad's clothes. I learned to dance and played soccer. These issues are crucial for parents to understand. A child doesn't determine their gender by their actions; their biology does.

Pope Francis explains that anthropology necessitates a respect for our dignity as human beings and natural law inscribed into our being. To understand anthropology, we must recognize that

“man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will,” said Pope Benedict XVI.

The Church teaches that God creates each human being male or female (cf. Gn 1:27). This is Christian anthropology, the study of human beings as persons and human nature itself in relation to God. In creating the human body masculine and feminine, God assigns dignity to the person, writes Pope St. John Paul II. Human persons find fulfillment through the genuine gift of themselves. We are integral in our sexuality as relational persons. That informs our bodily nature. John Paul II says there is a unity of the spiritual and biological inclinations that support the understanding of human nature as a union of body and soul. We cannot separate our minds or psyches from our bodies, even through surgery. Human persons are whole as created by God at the moment of conception. This is our dignity and created uniqueness.

Once we remove the male and female distinction in human nature, we deny the vision that the human person is a fruit of God’s creative act. We then become an abstraction who chooses for ourselves what nature we want to be, said Pope Benedict XVI. The idea of man and woman are disputed, he says, and the family is not a place of reciprocity, where the spiritual, physical and generative gift of oneself takes place.

Without this understanding of human dignity and the generative self-gift of our human nature, we can fall into relativism that predicates a fragmented anthropology based on feelings and emotions. This is especially seen in young people who follow the transgender trend.

Some middle schoolers, at the height of puberty, are questioning their sexual identities in groups. This is happening in private as well as public schools. In one Catholic school, a whole group of seventh grade girls talked about becoming transgender. When questioned by teachers, parents and ministers about where they were getting these

ideas, they said TikTok. If a young person watches videos about other youth revealing results of their gender change surgeries, they may fall prey to emotions and relativism of “being oneself” that these videos express.

As Catholics, we must pray for and help those who may be struggling with gender dysphoria, especially young people. The Church calls us to compassionate care, while always affirming God’s creation as good. As St. Ireneaus said, “The glory of God is man fully alive, but the life of man is the vision of God.”

Sister Nancy Usselmann, FSP, is director of the Pauline Center for Media Studies in Los Angeles. She is a media literacy educator, writer, film reviewer, speaker and author of a theology of popular culture, “A Sacred Look: Becoming Cultural Mystics.”