

Examining the Issue of Transgender on Human Sexuality in the Light of the Teaching of the Church

Andrea I. Nwanosike and Musa Augustine Ibrahim

Abstract

The thrust of this paper is the examination of the issue of transgender as it relates to our human sexuality through the lens of the teachings of the church. It is no doubt that since the debut of feminism in the late 18th century the society has continued to grow along the lines of new and strange anthropological ideologies which have constructively reconstructed and/or deliberately disparage natural realities and at worst, left so many today in a state of confused anthropological presentations of man as man and woman as woman so much so that the divine institution of “male and female He created them” has to a certain extent knuckled under. This is a form of denaturalization that has permeated the entire society leaving no stone untouched all in the garb of freedom and right. It has altered our school curriculums, our laws, and even our basic concept and/or definition of male, female and marriage. In fact, the Church appears to be most confronted by this ideology so much so that it seeks to destabilize the very heart of the church's teaching on marriage and priesthood. Thus, on a critical note, this paper tends examining the response and position of the Church to this new anthropological dimension of gender that seems to denaturalize our human sexuality and institutions.

Key words: Transgender, human sexuality, Catholic Church, Feminism

Introduction

Since the emergence of feminism in the late 18th century the society has continued to grow along the lines of new and strange anthropological ideologies which have constructively reconstructed and/or deliberately disparage natural realities and at worst, in our world today, left so many in a state of confused anthropological presentations of man as man and woman as woman so much so that the divine institution of “male and female He created them” has to a certain extent knuckled under. These were based on a reading of sexual differentiation that was strictly sociological, all in the garb of right of freedom (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2017). This denaturalization has infiltrated our society, such that in many places, curricula are being planned

and implemented which, as Pope Benedict XVI (2011) observes, allegedly convey a neutral conception of the person and of life, yet in fact reflect anthropology opposed to faith and to right reason.

It is no doubt that one of the problems confronting the human sexuality and the Church and her teachings today is what Oliven (1965) termed “transgenderism.” Others include gender identity and gender diverse which has seemingly scuttled the natural outlook and perceptibility of man as man and woman as woman. So ominous is this reality that marriage and other ministries as enshrine in the sacred scripture is in danger of denigration and even extinction. This gender confusion or paranoid as I perceive it, is does not only confront and significantly distorts the ideology of marriage and sexes of persons, such that today we no longer define marriage as the union between a man and a woman but between two consenting individuals, but has also confront the very heart of the Church's teaching on certain gender role related offices such Priesthood and ordination of deacon. The last Amazon synod and the German Church controversial “synodal Path” surprisingly expressed their support for official ministries for women and for a change in Church's teaching about homosexuality. These and other gender related confusion is a thing of concern and calls for urgent rectification. Thus, this article aims at examining the issue of transgender on human sexuality in the light of the teaching of the Church.

Conceptualization of some Terms

a. Gender

Gender had longed been understood as an item of social construct, and has been described by many scholars as such (Tom, 2018). Stoller (1968) was believed to have made the first distinction between the terms: gender and sex in 1970, which later became commonly accepted among feminists. In its modern English usage the word gender comes from the Middle English *gender*, *gendre*, a loanword from Anglo-Norman and Middle French *gendre*. This, in turn, came from Latin *genus*. Both words mean “kind,” “type,” or “sort,” also “(male or female) sex,” from Proto-Indo-European root “gene-” “give birth, beget,” with derivatives referring to procreation and familial and tribal groups (Ringe, 2006). Thus, it can be simply defined as that which configures the social and ideological construction and representation of differences between the male and the female sexes. According to Stoller (1968), the word gender describes how much feminine and masculine behavior an individual displays. Uzoma (2017), sees gender as “those traits and characteristics that a person is expected to possess by virtue of being male or female, as well as the different roles that the person is expected to perform”.

b. Sex

Etymologically, sex is derived from the Latin word “*sexus*” meaning a “sex, state of being either male or female, gender”. This can be seen as the quality of being either a male or a female. In a research conducted by Lamanna and

Riedmann (2014), sex is seen as “that which points only to male or female anatomy and physiology..., it is chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical components of males and female that are present at birth.” Thus, Stroller describes sex as the biological characteristics of a person (Mikkola, 2023). Oakley (1972), in an attempt to distinguish between sex and gender, asserts that, “sex refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. 'Gender' however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine'. From the foregoing definitions, one can say that sex is a biological categorization referring to innate features and reproductive capacities or prospects of individuals that are natural.

c. Human Sexuality

Human Sexuality in general term, refers to various sexually related aspects of human life, including physical and psychological development, and behaviors, attitudes, and social customs associated with the individual's sense of gender, relationships, sexual activity, mate selection, and reproduction (Sanders, 2008). The Marshal Cavendish Corporation (2010), presents human sexuality as the way people experience and express themselves sexually. This involves biological, psychological, physical, erotic, emotional, social, or spiritual feelings and behaviors (Gre'enberg, 2016). Thus sexuality permeates many areas of human life and culture, thereby setting humans apart from other members of the animal kingdom, in which the objective of sexuality is more often confined to reproduction.

d. Transgender

According to the American of Psychological Association [APA] (2014), Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. “Trans,” which is often the abbreviated form of transgender, such as when we say trans men or trans women, may also include people who are non-binary or genderqueer (Forsyth & Copes, 2014).

Categorization/Types of Transgender

It has been noted by the American Psychological Association has noted that many identities fall under the transgender umbrella. These include transsexuals, cross-dressers, drag queen and drag kings, and genderqueer.

i. Transsexual

This refers to people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex. These people often alter or wish to alter their bodies through hormones, surgery, and other means so as to conform, as possible, to their gender identities (APA, 2014). Here, however, is the distinctions between the terms transgender and transsexual which are commonly based on distinctions between gender and sex. Transsexuality may be said to deal more with physical aspects of one's

sex, while transgender considerations deal more with one's psychological gender disposition or predisposition, as well as the related social expectations that may accompany a given gender role (Swanstrom, 2006). This process of transition through medical intervention is often referred to as sex or gender reassignment, but more recently is also referred to as gender affirmation. Those people who were assigned female, but identify and live as male so that they alter or wish to alter their bodies through medical intervention to more closely resemble their gender identity are known as transsexual men or transmen (also known as female-to-male or FTM). While those people who were assigned male, but identify and live as female such that they alter or wish to alter their bodies through medical intervention to more closely resemble their gender identity are known as transsexual women or transwomen (also known as male-to-female or MTF). Sometimes these people would prefer to be referred to as a man or a woman, rather than as transgender.

ii. Cross-Dress

Cross-Dressers are people who wear clothing that is traditionally or stereotypically worn by another gender in their culture. However, the way they cross-dress from vary completely from one article of clothing to fully cross-dressing. The cross-dressers, unlike the transsexuals are usually comfortable with their assigned sex and do not wish to change it. It is just a form of gender expression that is not necessarily tied to erotic activity neither is it indicative of sexual orientation. The latitude to which some cultures or societies accept cross-dressing for men and women varies. In some cultures, one gender may be given more latitude than another for wearing clothing associated with a different gender (APA, 2014).

iii. Drag Queens and Kings

The term "*Drag Queens*" generally refers to men who dress as women for the purpose of entertaining others at bars, clubs, or other events. While Drag Kings, refers to women who dress as men for the purpose of entertaining others at bars, clubs, or other events (APA, 2014).

iv. Genderqueer

This term is usually employ for some people who identify their gender as falling outside the binary constructs of "male" and "female." They may define their gender as falling somewhere on a continuum between male and female, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. Sometimes they prefer the use of some personal pronouns to refer to them, indicating that they are neither masculine nor feminine, such as "*zie*" instead of "he" or "she," or "*hir*" instead of "his" or "her." Some genderqueer people do not identify as transgender (APA, 2014).

There are other categories of transgender people which include: *androgynous*, *multigendered*, *gender nonconforming*, *third gender*, and *two-spirit people*. However, the exact definitions of these terms vary from person to person and may change

over time, but often include a sense of blending or alternating genders. Some people who use these terms to describe themselves see traditional, binary concepts of gender as restrictive.

Basic Presuppositions that Promotes Transgenderism

There are certain sociological and anthropological theories that led and enliven the growth of transgender in our world today. For the sake of this paper we would like to center on the two most prominent of all: the feminist and queer theories. These theories used what Nagoshi and Brzuzy (2010), call social constructivist approaches to challenge essentialist ideas that maintained the oppression of certain gender and sexual identities.

a. Feminist Theory

Feminism is considered an umbrella term for a number of cultural phenomena related to women oppression under the patriarchy (Dicker, 2008). Feminist thought and activity can be historically divided into four waves: the first wave, which began in about 1800 and lasted until the 1930s, which was largely concerned with gaining equal rights between women and men; The second wave is concern with constituents of gender roles and women's sexuality. It began after the postwar chaos and the atmosphere of the liquefaction of social roles, which focuses on women's work and family environment, as early as from the early 1960s to the late 1980s (Malinowska, 2020). Simone de Beauvoir's phrase "one is not born a woman but becomes one" (Beauvoir, 1949/1956) served as a byword for the wave's effort toward relaxing the social idiom of femininity. The second-wave feminism seems to be the hallmark to transgender. It emphasizes the physical and psychological differences between women and men. In fact, some feminists criticized traditional psychoanalysis, notably the work of Sigmund Freud, for assuming that all people are, or should be, like men. Thus, they became concerned with ways in which women's perceptions were determined by the particular nature of the female body and by the female roles in reproduction and childbearing (Nagoshi & Stephanie Brzuzy, 2010). The third wave is presents itself as a new consciousness of women's role in technological evolution. It was seen as a moment of "growing expertise in navigating the internet, producing webpages, electronic zines and blogs" (Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2007). The fourth wave feminism, which protest violence against women and children, developed around 2012 to the empowerment of women, and to create greater gender equality in the society through the use of internet (social media) facilities such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, and so forth.

b. Queer Theory

Queer theory is a part of the field of queer studies whose roots can be found in women's studies, feminist theory, and gay and lesbian studies, as well as postmodern and poststructuralist theories (Gieseking, 2008). It is a framework of ideas that suggests identities are not stable or deterministic, particularly in regard to an individual's gender, sex, and/or sexuality. Queer theory wanted to

free sexuality from heteronormativity, intimacy from monogamy, and sex from private property (Berlant & Warner, 1998). The works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler are often considered the founding texts of queer theory, however, in 1991, Teresa de Lauretis used the words “queer theory” to describe a way of thinking that did not use heterosexuality or binary gender constructs as its starting point, but instead argued for a more fluid concept of identity (Lauretis, 1991).

The underlying presuppositions of these theories can be traced back to a dualistic anthropology, such as the Cartesianism of Descartes, which separate body (reduced to the status of inert matter) from human will, and thus itself becomes an absolute that can manipulate the body as it pleases (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2019). A kind of relativism now arise from this combination of physicalism and voluntarism in which everything that exists is of equal value and at the same time undifferentiated, without any real order or purpose. One central theme that runs through all these theories is the acceptance that one's gender ends up being viewed as more important than being of male or female sex. The effect of this move is chiefly to create a cultural and ideological revolution driven by relativism, and secondarily a juridical revolution, since such beliefs claim specific rights for the individual and across society.

The Nature or Nuture of Transgender on Human Sexuality

Our human sexuality plays a major role in our daily lives, regardless of our age, color or race. It has a strong effect on our personality, behaviors and sometimes character, whether biologically or naturally. Accordingly, gender plays an important role in the ways we express and present our sexuality. However, concerning why some people are transgender, a single universally accepted explanation is wanting. This is because the diversity of transgender expression and experiences argues against any simple or unitary explanation. However, in considering the etiology of transsexuality, the “nature versus nurture” controversy comes into play. Many experts believe that biological factors such as genetic influences and prenatal hormone levels, early experiences, and experiences later in adolescence or adulthood may all contribute to the development of transgender identities (APA, 2014). Brown and Rounsley (1996), assert that there are three possibilities for the “nature” or physiological aspect of the causation of transsexuality: first, is a prenatal hormonal explanation in which hypothalamic and endocrine control are unbalanced; second, is the overall health of the mother; prescription drugs and severe emotional trauma or high stress may affect brain chemistry of the fetus; third, is the different brain structures as conducted in a research by Kruijver et al., 2005).

Accordingly, Brown and Rounsley (1996), also posit three theories concerning the “nurture” or environmental aspect of transgender. First, this has to do parents pressuring their child to adopt the gender role of the opposite sex; however, this has been reported to be untrue in the case of the typical

transsexual. The second (explanation of the impact of environmental factors) is that if one or both of the parents were physically or emotionally absent the child would have to substitute as the “wife” or “husband,” for instance, in situations of long-term depression and mental or emotional illness of a parent during which the child would take up the discarded parental role. The third one, according to them, is that the presence of one overbearing and smothering parent and a weak or distant other parent affects gender identity, for the child identifies as a stronger parent. For example, in a FTM, “if strong male role model is lacking, the female child then may assume the role of being the provider and caretaker towards the mother to compensate for the weakness of the father.

Nevertheless, it is the believe by most gender identity experts that the causes of transsexuality is an overall interaction of both nature and nurture although some theorize that nature provides a predisposition towards incongruous gender and then the dynamics of environmental factors will trigger the actual transsexualism (Brown & Rounsley, 1996).

The Church's Position on Transgender

The Church has never ceased in her effort as a true teacher and moral guide, to give life and witness to the gospel values of hope, love, peace, and justice everywhere as part of its evangelical mission. And so, true her teachings, she continues to educate the world that concerning this truth about our life ad nature as creatures of God, bestowed with dignity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church CCC (2000), teaches that “Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out”. God did not create them transsexuals, but “male and female He created them” each with his/her own dignity, for the purpose of procreation and the good of family life. Besides, “by creating the human being man and woman, God gives personal dignity equally to the one and the other. Each of them, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity”. The Christian understanding of the human nature is rooted in the sacred scripture especially as we see in book of Genesis 1:27 where it is written “God created man in his own image... male and female he created them.” This passage reveals to us not only dignity inherent in us by the virtue of our being created in the image of God but also the lasting rapport between men and women, which brings them into intimate union with God.

In his address to the federal parliament at Reichstag Building, Germany, Pope Benedict VXI emphasizes the new approach to nature in which man tries to alter his own nature and warns that “Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will

is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled" (Benedict XVI, 2011). Accordingly, Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation on pastoral care of families also addresses the danger of gender ideology 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. Thus he emphasizes that "biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated" (Francis, 2016).

In his creative design, God did not make mistake in assigning each of us our own body, rather, in His wisdom, as revealed in the sacred scriptures, he "has assigned as a task to man his body, his masculinity and femininity; and that in masculinity and femininity he, in a way, assigned to him as a task his humanity, the dignity of the person, and also the clear sign of the interpersonal communion in which man fulfils himself through the authentic gift of himself" (John Paul, 1981). Therefore, we must come to the truth of appreciating who we truly are in the creative mind of God, male and female, to complement each other, and also valuing our unique femininity or masculinity. In fact, Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* notes that if we are going to be able to recognize ourselves in an encounter with someone who is different, to value our own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it (Francis, 2015).

To further buttress the position of the Church concerning Transgenderism, the beautiful document, "*Dignitas infinita*," released by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith which took five years to complete, and builds on the papal magisterium of the last decade, clearly regret a kind of ideological colonization that is "extremely dangerous since it cancels differences in its claim to make everyone equal" (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2024). This ideology, according to the document, envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. Therefore, the document, as the voice of the Church, emphasized that "biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated". In fact, it rejected all attempts to obscure reference to the ineliminable sexual difference between man and woman and assert that "We cannot separate the masculine and the feminine from God's work of creation, which is prior to all our decisions and experiences, and where biological elements exist which are impossible to ignore" (para. 59). Our dignity, and our identity can only be fully discovered by acknowledging and accepting this difference in reciprocity.

All these prove that the Church continues to stand in the light of what has been divinely handed down to her by our Lord Jesus Christ in the form of Sacred

Scripture and Sacred tradition which is expressed in her magisterial teaching, and continues to share this truth to all and sundry irrespective of creed since the truth is one which, is “male and female he created them,” and that our biological nature/sexes are gift from God which must be appreciate and respond appropriately in same dignity to which each is expected to the word of God through the Gospel. God wants us to procreate, fill the earth and conquer it through none other means than his divine providence of our biological nature/sexes which is consummated in marriage. This explains why the family life must be cherished, respected and protected.

Evaluation/Conclusion

From what has been discussed so far, it is obvious that the thrust of this transgender view of life is nothing short of an ideological reconstruction of our anthropology that has pervaded the society in the garb of freedom and right, and the gullible youths seems to be the target of this denaturalization. This was not the case some centuries ago. In fact, what was inconceivable and irrational both to the religious and secular spheres some 4 to 5 decades ago are now an outlook of life for some people. It is no doubt that sometimes people feed on our inexperience or unawareness of certain (unchangeable) realities (truth) to bring us to inconformity with their impious ideology which is nothing short of an expression of their deep rooted aversion for certain religious beliefs inconsistent with their way of life. This calls for a deep circumspection. What the society (and precisely the church) needs now is a panacea to this denaturalization that is seeking to destroy the very institution of our beliefs and reality. Therefore, if reconstruction was the tool used to bring to birth this ideology of transgenderism then a deconstruction mechanism, is needed to bring back these people back to the truth. This will include, first, dialogue through listening, reasoning and engaging in fruitful conversation as some it was for some it was for psychological reasons such as depression, poor parenting, and not being properly cared for that forced them into this state of life. Second is the education of the people especially from the elementary level, which will “promote the realisation of man and woman through the development of all their being, incarnate spirits, and of the gifts of nature and of grace by which they are enriched by God” (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1983). Consequently, we must understand that these people are in need of our help and so, we must express our Christian charity in line with what the Catholic Church teaches:

“Beyond the understandable difficulties which individuals may experience, the young need to be helped to accept their own body as it was created, for ‘thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation... An appreciation of our body as male or female is also necessary for our own self- awareness in an encounter with others different from ourselves. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find

mutual enrichment.' Only by losing the fear of being different, can we be freed of self-centeredness and self-absorption. Sex education should help young people to accept their own bodies and to avoid the pretension 'to cancel out sexual difference because one no longer knows how to deal with it' (Francis, 2011).

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