

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER



TRANSGENDERISM: CULTURAL OVERVIEW—HOW DID WE GET HERE?

PREPARED BY THE ETHICISTS OF THE NCBC
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“Catholic health care ministry is rooted in a commitment to promote and defend human dignity;
this is the foundation of its concern to respect the sacredness of every human life
from the moment of conception until death.”

—USCCB, *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, 5th ed. (2009), introduction to part 1.
This is true of all Catholic ministries.

SUMMARY

There has been considerable surprise, and even consternation, among Catholic leaders that the phenomenon of “transgenderism” has burst so quickly and dramatically on the scene. It has suddenly preoccupied legislators, government agencies, school officials, and church leaders and given rise to demonstrations and boycotts. But the issue, in fact, has been developing for some time and has some of its antecedents in the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the increasing moral relativism of our culture, radical political movements, and even culturally influential philosophers such as Voltaire, Nietzsche, and Marx.

A Broad Movement

- Estimates are that “transgender” individuals constitute no more than 0.6 percent of the population. Nonetheless, their agenda is embraced and advanced by pro-abortion and homosexual advocates and even community organizers, because it is more compatible with their vision of the human person and human society.
- The general philosophical outlook that underlies this cultural movement tends toward relativism, subjectivism, and even atheism. Thus, the autonomy of personal choice is paramount, as is a perceived right to enact values of one’s own creation. The Christian call to conform to an objective moral order, given to us by God, is seen as a form of coercion and therefore as illegitimate.

Advanced by Government and “Elite” Cultural Institutions

- Federal and state agencies have vast sums of money at their disposal, large workforces, and considerable power through the issuing of regulations to achieve social and cultural ends that are not always adequately delineated in legislation. The attempted enforcement of competing philosophical and political ideas can fluctuate considerably depending on which party is in power.
- US foreign policy has often been used to advance ideological views, as through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and cultural agencies. The State Department has even instructed US embassies and consulates to advance ideologies such as gender theory.
- Universities, even Catholic ones, often advance an ethos that accepts and rewards gender theory and punishes those academicians and students who do not conform.

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To request a consultation, e-mail consults@ncbcenter.org or call 215-877-2660.

- Foundations and advocacy organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign provide millions of dollars to advance the transgender agenda.
- Educational institutions even at the primary level are used to indoctrinate children on gender theory, a practice against which Pope Francis spoke with particular vehemence.

FAQs

Question 1. Might Catholic institutions run the risk of losing government funding by not advancing a cultural ideology that is being advanced by the government that happens to be in power?

Reply: Yes. But in order to remain faithful to the teachings of Christ and his Church, that might be necessary. There are institutions in the United States that have refused to accept any form of government funding so as not to compromise their convictions, such as Hillsdale College in Michigan. However, Catholic academic and cultural institutions can legitimately try to find ways to accept such funding and make use of the means provided by government to avoid violating their consciences. Attorneys for Catholic institutions should be very familiar with these means of protecting conscience and should make use of organizations that provide help in these matters, such as Becket Law and the Alliance Defending Freedom.

Question 2. How can the Catholic Church most effectively counter the societal influences of powerful elitist groups that advance programs contrary to Catholic faith and practice?

Reply: We cannot presume to answer that question. It is simply too complex. However, we should remind ourselves that we Catholics actually have the means to be much more effective than we might think possible in facing cultural challenges to the Faith. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, 81.6 million Americans, or 25 percent of the population, self-identify as Catholic. Catholics constitute the largest religious group in the United States. Catholic schools in the United States constitute the largest number of private schools in the country. Over 146,000 staff teach in Catholic schools. There are 261 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, the largest number of any religious group. And finally, the two largest nonprofit health care delivery systems in the country—Ascension and Catholic Health Initiatives—are both Catholic. One-sixth of all the hospital beds in the United States are Catholic. And there are estimates that half of all social services in United States are provided by the Catholic Church. If all these incredibly powerful and pervasive Catholic institutions were faithful to the teachings of the Church, they would wield a considerable cultural influence at every level of society.