

## **A Letter to Educationalists from Bishop Mark Davies On the Truth of the Human Person**

Dear Head teachers, Chairs of Governors and Heads of Religious Education,

There are now many questions arising in the world of education concerning the ideology of gender which underlies transgenderism. I am not thinking in this letter of individuals who, for a variety of complex reasons, experience difficulty identifying with their biological sex, be that of male or female. Our Christian approach to persons in any kind of confusion and suffering must always be one of respect, compassion and understanding, together with a commitment to seeking appropriate help.

However, today we are being encouraged – sometimes forcefully – not only to accept but to embrace an ideology of gender which is beginning to permeate social consciousness with far-reaching consequences. I have often warned that, in that vacuum left by the loss of Christian faith within contemporary society, new ideologies would emerge. For decades the Popes, from Saint John Paul II to Pope Francis, have warned that the radical ideology of gender would challenge the truth about the human person. In this short letter, I write to remind you of their words: When Pope Francis spoke to Bishops at World Youth Day 2016, his comments gained widespread attention in the secular media.

“We are living a moment of the annihilation of man as image of God,” the Holy Father observed, “of ideological colonisations ... one of these I say clearly with name and surname is gender! Today children – children! – are being taught in school that one can choose one’s sex.”

Echoing Pope Benedict’s words, Pope Francis went on to urge us to reflect that we are living in “the time of sin against God the Creator” (cf. transcript of the Holy Father’s dialogue with the Polish Bishops, 27th July 2016). At Christmas 2012, Pope Benedict had already spoken of this ideology:

“According to this philosophy, sex is no longer a given element of nature that man has to accept and personally make sense of; it is a social role that we choose for ourselves, whereas in the past it was chosen for us by society. The profound falsehood of this theory and the anthropological revolution contained within it is obvious. People dispute that they have a nature, given by

their bodily identity that serves as a defining element of the human being” (Christmas Address to the Roman Curia, 12th December 2012).

We are thus faced with claims that our physical characteristics do not determine who we are as a man or as a woman, and that gender is no more than a ‘social construct.’ And yet we know that sex is determined by physical characteristics which start to develop from conception. The Scriptures speak of these sexual differences being willed by God from the beginning (Genesis 1:26-27); they come into existence when we are conceived, as science universally affirms; and this complementarity of man and woman is ordered to procreation in which father and mother collaborate with God in the coming to be of a new person.

Saint John Paul II’s teaching in the “Theology of the Body,” gives us a providential guide for the years ahead. In it, he speaks powerfully of this unity between the self and the body, writing:

“The body reveals the person. This phrase tells us all there is to know about the body. Science can examine our flesh in minute detail, down to the cells and even the DNA. But no amount of scientific exploration can replace the truth that our bodies reveal us, giving form to our innermost being and unique personality. Our bodies are sacramental – they make the invisible visible” (Theology of the Body 9:4)

In his letter to the Church, ‘The Joy of Love,’ Pope Francis speaking again of the ideology of gender tells of its profound social implications. This is because it “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. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time” (Amoris Laetitia n. 56).

Again, in his recent letter on Ecology, ‘Laudato Si’, Pope Francis points to how this ideology impacts on our relationship with the whole created order:

“It is enough to recognise that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the

entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. 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" (LS n. 155).

For its part, the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that the human body is constitutive of our humanity and must always be respected as such. Echoing the words of the Second Vatican Council, the Catechism sums up the unique relationship between humanity and the material world, precisely through the body in union with the soul: "Man, though made of body and soul is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honour since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day" (CCC n. 364).

Today, the Church is being called to defend this very truth of the human person. We find ourselves at a moment when we must ponder more deeply God's love for us revealed in the human nature he gives us in creation; it is the same human nature which, in the mystery of the Incarnation, God the Son took to himself in becoming flesh (Jn. 1:18).

Already in 1994, in his 'Letter to Families,' Saint John Paul II observed: "Modern rationalism does not tolerate mystery. It does not accept the mystery of man as male and female, nor is it willing to admit that the full truth about man has been revealed in Jesus Christ" (n. 19).

It might be helpful to read a statement by the North American Bishops' setting out the Church's position. You can find it [here](#). Also of interest is a significant statement, produced in March 2016 by the American College of Paediatricians, in which they give their professional judgment on the harm gender ideology

and gender realignment procedures are doing to children (published in the Catholic Medical Quarterly, August 2016).

We must always show genuine love and understanding to those who are swayed or fall victim to the errors of our times. However, we can never compromise the truth of our faith nor allow the truth about the human person to be obscured, for that would be a false charity.

In early 2017, in the Diocese we hope to organise opportunities to reflect on the implications of this radical, ideological challenge. If questions or particular issues should arise in your own school or college, I would always ask you to contact our Diocesan Department for Education to seek appropriate advice at every stage.

Be assured of a remembrance in my prayer for the great work and witness of our Catholic schools,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+ Mark

Bishop of Shrewsbury

29th September 2016

Feast of the Holy Archangels, Ss Michael, Gabriel and Raphael