

Why Is the Church Against “Sex-Change” Surgery?

PRO TIP
Download other grades for alternate activities!

CONNECTIONS TO THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

CCC 356–357
CCC 364
CCC 2292–2296

MATERIALS

- ▶ [Why Is the Church Against “Sex-Change” Surgeries?](#)
- ▶ [Language of the Body](#)
- ▶ [Comparing and Contrasting Health Scenarios](#)

SUGGESTED TIME

45–50 minutes

Teacher Background

From her beginning, the Catholic Church has been the world's greatest defender of the equal dignity of all people because every person is made in the image of God. It is for this reason that the Church is against so-called "sex-change" surgery – and any other intervention that, though impossible, seeks to change a person's sex. Such actions threaten the fundamental dignity of the person and does irreparable damage to the body, which has been given as a gift from God that must be accepted as such, and honored, and utilized to give praise to God in return.



HOW DOES THIS LESSON HELP INOCULATE STUDENTS AGAINST GENDER IDEOLOGY?

The transgender movement has put forth the false narrative that sex is fluid and can be changed based upon a person's feelings or belief that they are the opposite sex. Basic biology, however, irrefutably shows that this narrative is untrue and deceptive. The truth is that sex – either male or female – is the body's design for a role in reproduction. Our sex is determined at our conception by the pair of sex chromosomes found in every cell in our bodies. These chromosomes – females have two X chromosomes and males have one X and one Y chromosome – define the type of gamete, or reproductive cell, a person produces: sperm or ova. Females produce large-cell gametes, (ova, or egg cells), and males produce small gametes (sperm). No pronouns, make-up, clothing, pharmaceutical treatment, (even if they induce secondary sex-characteristics,) or surgery can ever change a person's sex.

Activity

Teacher's Note

This activity should be presented to girls and boys separately. Work with another teacher and have a male teacher lead the boys group, and a female teacher lead the girls group.

Background/Homework

Prior to today's lesson, assign your students to read for homework Why Is the Church Against "Sex-Change" Surgeries? together with their parents and have them answer the critical thinking questions together.

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Why Is the Church Against "Sex-Change" Surgeries?

Directions: Read about why the Catholic Church is against so-called "sex-change" surgeries and discuss and respond to the critical thinking questions together with your parents. Be ready to discuss your responses in class.

Why is the Catholic Church against so-called "sex-change" surgery? In order to answer this question, it is important to first discuss what is meant by the term "sex-change" surgery. First, it is of great importance to be absolutely clear: a person's sex cannot change. Thus, the term "sex-change" surgery is a misnomer. There are no interventions, medical, pharmaceutical, surgical, or otherwise, that can change a person's sex.

Sex is the body's design for a role in reproduction. There are only two sexes, male and female. A person's sex is determined at his or her conception, can be observed on an ultrasound or at birth, and never changes. A person's sex is determined by the pair of sex chromosomes found in every cell of his or her body. Females have two X chromosomes, and males have one X and one Y chromosome. These sex chromosomes define the type of gamete, or reproductive cell, a person produces: sperm or ova. Females produce large-cell gametes, (ova, or egg cells), and males produce small gametes (sperm). That is, there is no third or any other type of gamete. There are only two sexes. This fundamental truth is an undeniable and unchangeable fact of our biology.

The False Narrative of the Transgender Movement
Despite these undeniably biological facts, the transgender movement puts forth the narrative that, if a person feels that he or she is really the opposite sex, then he or she really is the opposite sex, regardless of his or her biology. The person is told in no uncertain terms that, in order to align his or her body with his or her feelings, and, in many cases, for the suffering he or she experiences from discordant feelings to end, he or she must "transition."



The Angelus by Jean-François Millet (ca. 1857-1875)

2 WHY IS THE CHURCH AGAINST "SEX-CHANGE" SURGERY?

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GRADE 6: THE GIFT OF OUR IDENTITY

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- A. Begin by arranging your students into pairs. Distribute to each group **Language of the Body** and have them complete the activity together.
- B. When they have finished, have each pair partner with another pair and take turns sharing and discussing their responses to the questions from the activity.
- C. Finally, call on combined groups to share and discuss their responses to questions 7 and 8 with the class.

D. Explain to your students that our bodies are an important part of who we are as human beings. In fact, without our bodies, we are not fully human as God made us! We are not reduceable to just the physical matter that is our bodies (a human person is not merely a body), nor are we a spiritual soul trapped inside a body longing to escape (our souls are not more “us” than our bodies). When God made the first man, Adam, He formed his body from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, or his soul (see Genesis 2:7). God gave life to Adam — and to each of us — as a two-fold gift: Adam experiences life as a composite of body and soul. After God created the first human beings, comprised of both a body and a soul, He looked at what He had made — human beings in His image and likeness — and found it to be “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Everything God creates is good, therefore, the union of the human body and soul as God made it is also good. The *Catechism* affirms these fundamental truths about being human:

The human body shares in the dignity of “the image of God”: it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul . . . Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. . . . 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 honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. (364)

- E. Continue to explain that we communicate a lot about ourselves in and through our bodies. In fact, communicating in and through our bodies is the only way we can communicate. It has been said that, when we communicate, only 20 percent of what we communicate is through words, while the other 80% of communication is through body language. Our bodies have a “language” in more than one way.
 - We use our bodies to tell others something. For example, a pat on the back or hug tells someone we care, and even speaking requires the use of our bodies.
 - Our bodies use signs to tell us something about ourselves. For example, swelling can be a sign of injury.

F. Emphasize to your students that modern ideologies, especially the transgender movement, believe that our bodies are our own do with whatever we choose, even if we choose to mutilate or destroy parts or all of our body. These ideologies do not grasp the reality that our bodies united with our souls are gifts given to us by God and make us unique in all of creation. And like all gifts, we have an obligation to honor the gift and the giver by accepting it with gratitude and using it responsibly in a way that upholds its dignity and design, and builds up the Kingdom of God.

G. Then go over students' answers from their homework reading and critical thinking questions from [Why Is the Church Against "Sex-Change" Surgeries?](#) using the answer key to guide your discussion.

H. When finished, distribute to your students [Comparing and Contrasting Health Scenarios](#) and have them work independently to read the scenarios and respond to the questions. When they have finished, have them discuss the synthesis questions with a partner. Then call on a few volunteers to share and discuss their responses.

I. Close class with a prayer. Write on the board and prayerfully read aloud the following Bible verse. Spend some time in silent prayer praising God for the wonderful gift of our bodies.

I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know. —PSALM 139:14

+2

Comparing and Contrasting Health Scenarios

Directions: Read each scenario and discuss the questions that follow. Then answer the synthesis questions with a partner of the same sex as you.

Scenario 1

A young woman is playing softball after school on the varsity team. She is out in left field when she races to catch what looks like it will be a home run. She leaps into the air, catches the ball, but lands hard on her left side. As she hits the ground, she feels an excruciating pain in her ankle. She is carried off the field and taken to the emergency room where a doctor examines her.

The doctor reads:

- 1. Wrap her ankle in a soft cast and hope it feels better.
- 2. Cut off her ankle since it is hurting her.
- 3. Take an x-ray to find out if there is a fracture or break before proceeding with treatment.

Critical Thinking Questions:

- 1. What is this doctor called to do in light of our Catholic faith?
- 2. What do you think the best course of action would be? Why?
- 3. How do you think each course of action would affect this patient?

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12 WHY IS THE CHURCH AGAINST "SEX-CHANGE" SURGERY? © SOPHIA INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS

Why Is the Church Against “Sex-Change” Surgeries?

Directions: Read about why the Catholic Church is against so-called “sex-change” surgeries and discuss and respond to the critical thinking questions together with your parents. Be ready to discuss your responses in class.

Why is the Catholic Church against so-called “sex-change” surgery? In order to answer this question, it is important to first discuss what is meant by the term “sex-change” surgery. First, it is of great importance to be absolutely clear: a person’s sex cannot change. Thus, the term “sex-change” surgery is a misnomer. There are no interventions, psycho-social, pharmaceutical, surgical, or otherwise, that can change a person’s sex.

Sex is the body’s design for a role in reproduction. There are only two sexes, male and female. A person’s sex is determined at his or her conception, can be observed on an ultrasound or at birth, and never changes. A person’s sex is determined by the pair of sex chromosomes found in every cell of his or her body: females have two X chromosomes, and males have one X and one Y chromosome. These sex chromosomes define the type of gamete, or reproductive cell, a person produces: sperm or ova. Females produce large-cell gametes, (ova, or egg cells), and males produce small gametes (sperm). That’s it; there is no third or any other type of gamete. There are only two sexes. This fundamental truth is an undeniable and unchangeable fact of our biology.

The False Narrative of the Transgender Movement

Despite these irrefutable biological facts, the transgender movement puts forth the narrative that, if a person feels that he or she is really the opposite sex, then he or she really is the opposite sex, regardless of his or her biology. The person is told in no uncertain terms that, in order to align his or her body with his or her feelings, and, in many cases, for the suffering he or she experiences from discordant feelings to end, he or she must “transition”



The Angelus by Jean-François Millet (ca. 1857–1859).

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

into the opposite sex through a host of interventions. These interventions typically begin with psycho-social transitioning, such as adopting opposite-sex pronouns, dressing as the opposite sex, and selecting a new name representative of his or chosen sex. Over 80% of the time this approach progresses to the person being put on puberty blockers (if he or she is still a child) and high-dose cross-sex hormones (to suppress his or her sex hormones and increase the hormones of the opposite sex to produce secondary sex characteristics), culminating in irreversible “sex-change” surgeries to remove or alter primary and secondary sex characteristics (more on these surgeries below). Insidiously, transgender ideology encourages that this process of transitioning begin at very young ages, before puberty.



The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise
by Benjamin West (1791).

“Sex-Change” Surgeries

Often, the culminating “sex-change” surgeries – which, again, do not and cannot change a person’s sex – have been given harmless-sounding names that hide what they really are. For example, so-called “top-surgery,” for women, means cutting off a woman’s breasts to make a more masculine looking chest. So-called “bottom surgery,” for women means taking skin from the arm, thigh, or back, or using the existing skin of the vagina to create the appearance of a penis. (This surgically-created appendage cannot function sexually.) “Bottom surgery” for women may also include the removal of the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, and cervix. In other words, her entire reproductive system, miraculously designed by God to nurture new life, will be destroyed.

“Bottom surgery” for men involves removal of the penis and scrotum, and then using tissue from the penis or intestine to create the illusion of a vagina. This surgically-created “neo-vagina” is, in essence, a wound that the man’s body will never stop trying to heal. So he will have to dilate it regularly to prevent it from closing for as long as he has it. A known complication is leaking of fecal matter into it.

It cannot be overstated: these surgeries do not – and cannot – change a person’s sex, and they do not create functioning opposite-sex body parts. Remember, our sex is determined on a genetic level and is imprinted in every last cell in our bodies. No amount of invasive and irreversible surgery, hormonal or pharmaceutical treatment, or adoption of new personas can change this fact.

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY



The Resurrection of Christ
by Alonso López de Herrera (ca. 1625).

The Dignity of the Human Person

We can now return to the original question: why is the Catholic Church against so called “sex-change” surgeries? Primarily because they fail to respect the dignity of the human person, particularly the dignity of our bodies.

Regarding the dignity of the human body, the *Catechism* plainly teaches:

The human body shares in the dignity of “the image of God”: it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit:

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 honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. (364)

The 2024 document on human dignity from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitatis Infinita*, reflects on these truths:

[H]umans are inseparably composed of both body and soul. In this, the body serves as the living context in which the interiority of the soul unfolds and manifests itself. . . . Constituting the person’s being, the soul and the body both participate in the dignity that characterizes every human. Moreover, the body participates in that dignity as it is endowed with personal meanings, particularly in its sexed condition. It is in the body that each person recognizes himself or herself as generated by others, and it is through their bodies that men and women can establish a loving relationship capable of generating other persons. Teaching about the need to respect the natural order of the human person, Pope Francis affirmed that “creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created.” (60)

For these reasons, *Dignitatis Infinita* concludes, “It follows that any sex-change intervention, as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception” (60).

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

Unity of Body and Soul

All human beings are a unity of body and soul. Our soul is not contained, housed, or trapped in the shell of a body. It is not more “us” than our body, or our true self. Neither does the soul come into existence on its own or have the ability to join a different body. Rather, the soul is completely integrated with the body, and, in fact, it is precisely the composite of body and soul that makes us human. This can be a challenging idea for people who think of their bodies as somehow less than their “real self,” but this widely-believed and age-old notion is false (and an ancient heresy well beyond the purview of this essay to fully unpack).

If a person were to cut off his or her arm or leg for no good reason, it would be a sinful act because it would destroy God’s creation. In the same way, “sex-change” surgery mutilates and removes healthy body parts when there is no disorder that

makes such surgery necessary. Further, such surgery does not help a body function as it was designed – in fact, it does the opposite – and it creates significant ongoing pain and trauma.

The unity of our body and soul is part of God’s created, natural order. That natural order must be respected and cannot be dominated or controlled. That is why the Catholic Church has always encouraged medical interventions that respect life and heal the body, helping it function as it was designed.

Because of the dangers of “sex-change” surgeries, many of the countries on the forefront of transgender movement a decade ago – such as Norway, Sweden, and other European countries – have seen the bad effects and have made a U-turn away from medical and surgical interventions, especially to minors. Instead, they now focus on psychotherapy to treat those who experience body and identity-related distress.



The Resurrection of Christ by Alonso López de Herrera (ca. 1625).

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

Critical Thinking Questions:

- 1 Can a person's sex change? Why or why not? Why is it important to have a correct answer to this question?

No, a person's sex cannot change. From the moment of a person's conception, he or she is either male or female, determined by the pair of sex chromosomes found in every cell of his or her body: females have two X chromosomes, and males have one X and one Y chromosome. Our sex chromosomes define the type of gamete, or reproductive cell, a person produces: sperm or ova. Females produce large-cell gametes, (ova, or egg cells), and males produce small gametes (sperm). It is important to understand that our sex cannot change because the transgender movement has created the false narrative that a person's sex is malleable and, based upon a person's feelings, can be changed through various psycho-social, pharmaceutical, and surgical interventions marketed as "sex-change" interventions.

- 2 Why are so-called "sex-change" surgeries actually harmful to a person rather than achieving the change of sex they promise?

So-called "sex-change" surgeries do irreversible damage to a person's body, removing genitals and fabricating non-functional "genitals" out of remaining tissue or tissue from elsewhere on the body. These surgeries can only create a physical approximation of the body of a person's opposite sex. They do not and cannot actually change a person's sex, which is determined on a genetic level and is imprinted in every cell in our bodies.

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

- 3 What is the source of human dignity? What constitutes a “whole human person” and what is the human person intended to become? Why are we “obliged” to regard our bodies as good and hold our bodies in honor?

Human dignity comes from the fact that we are made in God’s image and likeness (rather than from anything we can do). The whole human person is a unity of body and soul – a human body animated by a spiritual soul. The human person is intended to become a Temple of the Holy Spirit through Baptism. We are all obliged to regard our bodies as good and hold them in honor because they are willed and created by God, in union with our souls, and will be raised up on the last day.

- 4 What does Pope Francis teach about the creation of our bodies as a gift from God?

He teaches that creation is prior to us – it comes before us – and thus our bodies, created by God, must be received as the gift that they are. Because our bodies are gifts from God, we must protect, accept, and respect them as they are designed.

- 5 What does the Catholic Church teach clearly about any so-called sex-change intervention?

All sex-change interventions threaten the unique dignity of the human person.

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

- 6 Have you ever been tempted to think of the soul as more “you” than your body, or your body more “you” than your soul? Why are neither of these perspectives correct? How does our culture tend to view the relationship between the body and the soul?

Accept reasoned answers. Neither perspective is correct because our souls are completely integrated with our bodies; it is precisely the composite of body and soul that makes us human. Our culture can take both false perspectives of the relationship between the body and soul depending on the situation, reducing the human person to merely the body and physical, material processes, or contrarily, suggesting our bodies do not matter and who we are is based on how we feel or what we believe about ourselves. Accept reasoned examples.

- 7 Does it surprise you that many European countries, which had been at the forefront of so-called “gender-affirming” drugs and surgeries, have turned away from these treatments in favor of psychotherapy? Why or why not?

Accept reasoned answers.

- 8 How would you answer in your own words the original question of this essay: why is the Catholic Church against so called “sex-change” surgeries?

Accept reasoned answers that include reference to the reality of the unity of the body and soul as created by God, that this unity is good and a profound gift, and that we are, thus, obliged to honor and respect the gift of our bodies. The human person, who is a unity of body and soul, possesses dignity because he or she is made in God’s image and likeness. So-called “sex-change” surgeries, then, threaten the dignity of the human person and cause irreversible harm to the body, failing to honor respect the gift God has given us.

Language of the Body

Directions: Read each situation in the left column of the chart. Then, in the middle column, “translate” what the person’s body is saying/what they are saying with their body. Finally, in the right column, write what the person should do in response. Some have been filled in for you.

Situation	What Is the Body Saying?	What Should the Person Do?
<p>1 John has just started training for a marathon. Even though he just started training, he has been trying to run 26 miles every day. The muscles on the back of his legs are very sore.</p>	<p>“Ouch, you’re working me too hard!!”</p>	<p>Rest for a day and then re-start training, gradually increasing running time and distance.</p>
<p>2 Lily has asthma. She walks into a room where people are smoking. She starts to wheeze and cough.</p>	<p>“The air in this room is making it hard to breathe.”</p>	<p>Leave the room.</p>
<p>3 Luis is about to give a speech for the first time ever. As he looks out at the audience of hundreds of people, his heart is beating really fast and his hands are shaking.</p>	<p>“This is scary. I need to calm down.”</p>	<p>Take a deep breath.</p>
<p>4 Kelly has fair skin. After spending only 20 minutes in the sun, her face starts to turn pink and feel hot.</p>	<p>This amount of sunlight is bad!</p>	<p>Go inside, put on sunscreen and a hat. Use aloe on a burn.</p>

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

- 5 What does it mean that the body “speaks a language”?

Accept reasoned answers.

- 6 What is the difference between your body telling you something and you saying something with your body?

We can choose to express things with our bodies, such as love (a hug), excitement (jumping up and down) or reverence (kneeling). When our body tells us something, it is not something we have willed, or chosen to express. It is our body communicating that something is wrong, or something is needed.

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

1. Option c. This is the only option that respectfully considers the young woman's experience of pain and offers a reasonable and measured solution that honors her body.
2. Accept reasoned answers.
3. Option a would be disrespectful to the woman's experience of pain, likely not resolve the problem, and may end her athletic career. Option b would be irreversibly damaging to her body and a negligent and gross overreaction to the problem. See answer 1 for more about option c.

Comparing and Contrasting Health Scenarios

Directions: Read each scenario and discuss the questions that follow. Then answer the synthesis questions with a partner of the same sex as you.

Scenario 1

A young woman is playing softball after school on the varsity team. She is out in left field when she races to catch what looks like it will be a home run. She leaps into the air, catches the ball, but lands hard on her left side. As she hits the ground, she feels an excruciating pain in her ankle. She is carried off the field and taken to the emergency room where a doctor examines her.

The doctor could:

- a Wrap her ankle in a soft cast and hope it feels better.
- b Cut off her ankle since it is hurting her.
- c Take an x-ray to find out if there is a fracture or break before proceeding with treatment.

Critical Thinking Questions:

- 1 What is this doctor called to do in light of our Catholic Faith?
- 2 What do you think the best course of action would be? Why?
- 3 How do you think each course of action would affect this patient?

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

Scenario 2

A young man goes to his eye doctor because he is having headaches when reading. He tells the doctor that the words on the page are blurry and it is difficult for him to see unless he holds what he is reading at a certain distance. He is concerned because it makes doing schoolwork difficult and his grades are suffering.

The doctor could:

- a Tell him to use a magnifying glass and hope it helps.
- b Give him drugs to cause blindness so that will cure his headaches.
- c Do a complete eye exam and look into his eyes with special instruments to make sure his eyes are healthy.

Critical Thinking Questions:

- 4 What is this doctor called to do in light of our Catholic Faith?
- 5 What do you think the best course of action would be? Why?
- 6 How do you think each course of action would affect this patient?

- 4. Option c. This is the only option that respectfully considers the young man's experience of vision difficulties and offers a reasonable and measured solution that honors his body.
- 5. Accept reasoned answers.
- 6. Option a would be disrespectful of the man's experience and would not resolve the problem. Option b would irreversibly damage his eyesight and be a gross overreaction to the problem. See answer 4 for more about option c.

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

7. Option c. This is the only option that respectfully considers the boy's experience and offers a reasonable and measured intervention that honors his body.
8. Accept reasoned answers.
9. Option a would be disrespectful of the boy's experience of pain and not resolve any of his mental health issues. It would also interrupt the natural processes of his body and cause irreversible damage to his body. Option b would likewise be disrespectful of the boy's experience of pain and not resolve his mental health issues. It would irreversibly damage his body to undergo surgery when there is no ailment of his body that requires surgery to correct. See answer 7 for more about option c.

Scenario 3

A 15-year-old boy sees his pediatrician and requests cross-sex hormones. He recently told his mom and older sister that he wants them to use the pronouns "she" and "her" to refer to him because he feels that he is actually a girl, and that he wants to begin transitioning to be a girl. His parents divorced when he was 4, and he has had little contact with his father. His mother has battled severe depression in the years since the divorce. He began to feel like he might be a girl when he was around 6 and would play dress-up with his then 8-year-old sister. Playing dress-up always made him feel good, especially when his mom and sister smiled at him. As he grew up, he also experienced bouts of depression, which caused him to frequently miss school. As a result, he has never felt like he fits in. He plans to soon start dressing as a girl at school and has begun to explore surgical interventions for the future.

The doctor could:

- a Prescribe him cross-sex hormones to begin a physical "transition."
- b Suggest "sex-change" surgery as soon as possible to align the way his body looks with his feelings.
- c Counsel him to take no steps towards "transitioning" and refer him, along with his family, to a therapist.

Critical Thinking Questions:

- 7 What is this doctor called to do in light of our Catholic Faith?
- 8 What do you think the best course of action would be? Why?
- 9 How do you think each course of action would affect this patient?

STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

Synthesis Questions

When we care about someone, we are concerned about how they are feeling. We try to understand what they are telling us, even if it is hard at first. Consider the three scenarios again: which are the health solutions that demonstrate care for the human body and try to “listen” to its language?

No. A doctor would be terribly negligent of his duties and, in fact, being doing harm to his patient, if he were to do so.

A doctor would not treat a broken ankle by amputating it. Should that same doctor consider prescribing hormones or recommending surgery to physically alter a young man’s appearance when there is nothing physically wrong with him?

For all the scenarios, only letter c demonstrates care for the human body and listens to what that body is actually saying.

Why Is the Church Against “Sex-Change” Surgery?

Why Is the Church Against “Sex-Change” Surgeries?

Directions: Read about why the Catholic Church is against so-called “sex-change” surgeries and discuss and respond to the critical thinking questions together with your parents. Be ready to discuss your responses in class.

Why is the Catholic Church against so-called “sex-change” surgery? In order to answer this question, it is important to first discuss what is meant by the term “sex-change” surgery. First, it is of great importance to be absolutely clear: a person’s sex cannot change. Thus, the term “sex-change” surgery is a misnomer. There are no interventions, psycho-social, pharmaceutical, surgical, or otherwise, that can change a person’s sex.

Sex is the body’s design for a role in reproduction. There are only two sexes, male and female. A person’s sex is determined at his or her conception, can be observed on an ultrasound or at birth, and never changes. A person’s sex is determined by the pair of sex chromosomes found in every cell of his or her body: females have two X chromosomes, and males have one X and one Y chromosome. These sex chromosomes define the type of gamete, or reproductive cell, a person produces: sperm or ova. Females produce large-cell gametes, (ova, or egg cells), and males produce small gametes (sperm). That’s it; there is no third or any other type of gamete. There are only two sexes. This fundamental truth is an undeniable and unchangeable fact of our biology.

The False Narrative of the Transgender Movement

Despite these irrefutable biological facts, the transgender movement puts forth the narrative that, if a person feels that he or she is really the opposite sex, then he or she really is the opposite sex, regardless of his or her biology. The person is told in no uncertain terms that, in order to align his or her body with his or her feelings, and, in many cases, for the suffering he or she experiences from discordant feelings to end, he or she must “transition”



The Angelus by Jean-François Millet (ca. 1857–1859).

into the opposite sex through a host of interventions. These interventions typically begin with psycho-social transitioning, such as adopting opposite-sex pronouns, dressing as the opposite sex, and selecting a new name representative of his or chosen sex. Over 80% of the time this approach progresses to the person being put on puberty blockers (if he or she is still a child) and high-dose cross-sex hormones (to suppress his or her sex hormones and increase the hormones of the opposite sex to produce secondary sex characteristics), culminating in irreversible “sex-change” surgeries to remove or alter primary and secondary sex characteristics (more on these surgeries below). Insidiously, transgender ideology encourages that this process of transitioning begin at very young ages, before puberty.



The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise by Benjamin West (1791).

“Sex-Change” Surgeries

Often, the culminating “sex-change” surgeries — which, again, do not and cannot change a person’s sex — have been given harmless-sounding names that hide what they really are. For example, so-called “top-surgery,” for women, means cutting off a woman’s breasts to make a more masculine looking chest. So-called “bottom surgery,” for women means taking skin from the arm, thigh, or back, or using the existing skin of the vagina to create the appearance of a penis. (This surgically-created appendage cannot function sexually.) “Bottom surgery” for women may also include the removal of the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, and cervix. In other words, her entire reproductive system, miraculously designed by God to nurture new life, will be destroyed.

“Bottom surgery” for men involves removal of the penis and scrotum, and then using tissue from the penis or intestine to create the illusion of a vagina. This surgically-created “neo-vagina” is, in essence, a wound that the man’s body will never stop trying to heal. So he will have to dilate it regularly to prevent it from closing for as long as he has it. A known complication is leaking of fecal matter into it.

It cannot be overstated: these surgeries do not — and cannot — change a person’s sex, and they do not create functioning opposite-sex body parts. Remember, our sex is determined on a genetic level and is imprinted in every last cell in our bodies. No amount of invasive and irreversible surgery, hormonal or pharmaceutical treatment, or adoption of new personas can change this fact.



***The Resurrection of Christ* by Alonso López de Herrera (ca. 1625).**

The Dignity of the Human Person

We can now return to the original question: why is the Catholic Church against so called “sex-change” surgeries? Primarily because they fail to respect the dignity of the human person, particularly the dignity of our bodies.

Regarding the dignity of the human body, the *Catechism* plainly teaches:

The human body shares in the dignity of “the image of God”: it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit:

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 honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. (364)

The 2024 document on human dignity from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitatis Infinita*, reflects on these truths:

[H]umans are inseparably composed of both body and soul. In this, the body serves as the living context in which the interiority of the soul unfolds and manifests itself. . . .

Constituting the person’s being, the soul and the body both participate in the dignity that characterizes every human. Moreover, the body participates in that dignity as it is endowed with personal meanings, particularly in its sexed condition. It is in the body that each person recognizes himself or herself as generated by others, and it is through their bodies that men and women can establish a loving relationship capable of generating other persons. Teaching about the need to respect the natural order of the human person, Pope Francis affirmed that “creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created.” (60)

For these reasons, *Dignitatis Infinita* concludes, “It follows that any sex-change intervention, as a rule, risks threatening the unique dignity the person has received from the moment of conception” (60).

Unity of Body and Soul

All human beings are a unity of body and soul. Our soul is not contained, housed, or trapped in the shell of a body. It is not more “us” than our body, or our true self. Neither does the soul come into existence on its own or have the ability to join a different body. Rather, the soul is completely integrated with the body, and, in fact, it is precisely the composite of body and soul that makes us human. This can be a challenging idea for people who think of their bodies as somehow less than their “real self,” but this widely-believed and age-old notion is false (and an ancient heresy well beyond the purview of this essay to fully unpack).

If a person were to cut off his or her arm or leg for no good reason, it would be a sinful act because it would destroy God’s creation. In the same way, “sex-change” surgery mutilates and removes healthy body parts when there is no disorder that

makes such surgery necessary. Further, such surgery does not help a body function as it was designed — in fact, it does the opposite — and it creates significant ongoing pain and trauma.

The unity of our body and soul is part of God’s created, natural order. That natural order must be respected and cannot be dominated or controlled. That is why the Catholic Church has always encouraged medical interventions that respect life and heal the body, helping it function as it was designed.

Because of the dangers of “sex-change” surgeries, many of the countries on the forefront of transgender movement a decade ago — such as Norway, Sweden, and other European countries — have seen the bad effects and have made a U-turn away from medical and surgical interventions, especially to minors. Instead, they now focus on psychotherapy to treat those who experience body and identity-related distress.



The Resurrection of Christ by Alonso López de Herrera (ca. 1625).

Critical Thinking Questions:

- 1 Can a person's sex change? Why or why not? Why is it important to have a correct answer to this question?

- 2 Why are so-called "sex-change" surgeries actually harmful to a person rather than achieving the change of sex they promise?

3 What is the source of human dignity? What constitutes a “whole human person” and what is the human person intended to become? Why are we “obliged” to regard our bodies as good and hold our bodies in honor?

4 What does Pope Francis teach about the creation of our bodies as a gift from God?

5 What does the Catholic Church teach clearly about any so-called sex-change intervention?

6 Have you ever been tempted to think of the soul as more “you” than your body, or your body more “you” than your soul? Why are neither of these perspectives correct? How does our culture tend to view the relationship between the body and the soul?

7 Does it surprise you that many European countries, which had been at the forefront of so-called “gender-affirming” drugs and surgeries, have turned away from these treatments in favor of psychotherapy? Why or why not?

8 How would you answer in your own words the original question of this essay: why is the Catholic Church against so called “sex-change” surgeries?

Language of the Body

Directions: Read each situation in the left column of the chart. Then, in the middle column, “translate” what the person’s body is saying/what they are saying with their body. Finally, in the right column, write what the person should do in response. Some have been filled in for you.

Situation	What Is the Body Saying?	What Should the Person Do?
<p>1 John has just started training for a marathon. Even though he just started training, he has been trying to run 26 miles every day. The muscles on the back of his legs are very sore.</p>	<p>“Ouch, you’re working me too hard!!”</p>	
<p>2 Lily has asthma. She walks into a room where people are smoking. She starts to wheeze and cough.</p>		
<p>3 Luis is about to give a speech for the first time ever. As he looks out at the audience of hundreds of people, his heart is beating really fast and his hands are shaking.</p>		
<p>4 Kelly has fair skin. After spending only 20 minutes in the sun, her face starts to turn pink and feel hot.</p>		<p>Go inside, put on sunscreen and a hat. Use aloe on a burn.</p>

5 What does it mean that the body “speaks a language”?

6 What is the difference between your body telling you something and you saying something with your body?

Comparing and Contrasting Health Scenarios

Directions: Read each scenario and discuss the questions that follow. Then answer the synthesis questions with a partner of the same sex as you.

Scenario 1

A young woman is playing softball after school on the varsity team. She is out in left field when she races to catch what looks like it will be a home run. She leaps into the air, catches the ball, but lands hard on her left side. As she hits the ground, she feels an excruciating pain in her ankle. She is carried off the field and taken to the emergency room where a doctor examines her.

The doctor could:

- a** Wrap her ankle in a soft cast and hope it feels better.
- b** Cut off her ankle since it is hurting her.
- c** Take an x-ray to find out if there is a fracture or break before proceeding with treatment.

Critical Thinking Questions:

- 1** What is this doctor called to do in light of our Catholic Faith?
- 2** What do you think the best course of action would be? Why?
- 3** How do you think each course of action would affect this patient?

Scenario 2

A young man goes to his eye doctor because he is having headaches when reading. He tells the doctor that the words on the page are blurry and it is difficult for him to see unless he holds what he is reading at a certain distance. He is concerned because it makes doing schoolwork difficult and his grades are suffering.

The doctor could:

- a Tell him to use a magnifying glass and hope it helps.
- b Give him drugs to cause blindness so that will cure his headaches.
- c Do a complete eye exam and look into his eyes with special instruments to make sure his eyes are healthy.

Critical Thinking Questions:

- 4 What is this doctor called to do in light of our Catholic Faith?
- 5 What do you think the best course of action would be? Why?
- 6 How do you think each course of action would affect this patient?

Scenario 3

A 15-year-old boy sees his pediatrician and requests cross-sex hormones. He recently told his mom and older sister that he wants them to use the pronouns “she” and “her” to refer to him because he feels that he is actually a girl, and that he wants to begin transitioning to be a girl. His parents divorced when he was 4, and he has had little contact with his father. His mother has battled severe depression in the years since the divorce. He began to feel like he might be a girl when he was around 6 and would play dress-up with his then 8-year-old sister. Playing dress-up always made him feel good, especially when his mom and sister smiled at him. As he grew up, he also experienced bouts of depression, which caused him to frequently miss school. As a result, he has never felt like he fits in. He plans to soon start dressing as a girl at school and has begun to explore surgical interventions for the future.

The doctor could:

- a Prescribe him cross-sex hormones to begin a physical “transition.”
- b Suggest “sex-change” surgery as soon as possible to align the way his body looks with his feelings.
- c Counsel him to take no steps towards “transitioning” and refer him, along with his family, to a therapist.

Critical Thinking Questions:

- 7 What is this doctor called to do in light of our Catholic Faith?
- 8 What do you think the best course of action would be? Why?
- 9 How do you think each course of action would affect this patient?

Synthesis Questions

When we care about someone, we are concerned about how they are feeling. We try to understand what they are telling us, even if it is hard at first. Consider the three scenarios again: which are the health solutions that demonstrate care for the human body and try to “listen” to its language?

A doctor would not treat a broken ankle by amputating it. Should that same doctor consider prescribing hormones or recommending surgery to physically alter a young man’s appearance when there is nothing physically wrong with him?
