

TRANSGENDERISM

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

FRANCIS ETHEREDGE

A Biography and Foreword by
Kiki Latimer

A Spiritual Biography and Afterword
of 'a poet of the Lord', James Sale, and his piece,
"The Father of All Lights"

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¹ Published, as are a number of these prayers, by Gordon Nary, the editor of “Profiles in Catholicism”; just google the website and see for yourself.

BIOGRAPHY and FOREWORD

Kiki Latimer

Kiki Latimer, host of The Catholic Bookworm podcast, has a BA in the Oral Interpretation of Literature, Psychology, & Philosophy from the University of Rhode Island and a Master's in Moral Theology from Holy Apostles College & Seminary in Cromwell, Ct, where she taught Homiletics. She is the author of *Home for the Homily-The Sacred Art of Homiletics*, *Seeing God's Face-A Catholic American Woman in India*, and her Haiti memoir *There Be Hope*. She is co-author with Stephen Schwarz of *Philosophy Begins in Wonder and Understanding Abortion- From Mixed Feelings to Rational Thought*. Kiki has also taught courses on *Silence & Solitude*, as well as *Metaphysics*, *Epistemology*, *Virtue Ethics*, and *Understanding Abortion*. In addition, she is a children's author with four published books: *Islands of Hope*, *The WaterFire Duck*, *BubbleButt*, and *Heal of the Hand*. (www.kikilatimer.com).

She has four grown children and is grandmother to fourteen grandchildren. She is a 1985 convert to Catholicism and lives with her husband Jim in Hope Valley, RI.

Conversion

My journey into the Catholic Church was one of grace, faith, and reason. During my teenage years I attended an Anglican Church with a pastor, Fr. Robert Creech, who believed in the Real Presence in the Eucharist and had a devotion to Mary, Mother of God. Fr. Creech, who later converted to Orthodoxy, was a strong foundational influence on my own conversion to Catholicism years later. In 1980, at a secular college my husband and I found ourselves immersed in a very Catholic philosophy department

that began to form our understanding of contraception, abortion, and sexuality in a manner that was reason-based, rather than our society-based confusions. At the same time we were attending an American Episcopal ecclesial community that upheld abortion, divorce, contraception, and homosexuality as human rights. In the end, it was the issue of women in the priesthood that pressed the decision to become Catholic as the importance of the Real Presence in the Eucharist was vital to us. We began to realize that all the arguments in the Episcopal community were based on sociological demands rather than philosophical and theological reasoning. To consider many aspects of faith guided by reason, my husband and I delved into the writings of C S Lewis, G K Chesterton, Joseph Ratzinger, Thomas Aquinas, Peter Kreeft, Thomas Merton, Deitrich von Hildebrand, Christopher Derrick, and many papal encyclicals of the Church. At the same time, Pope John Paul II was illuminating the Church and the world with his saintly papal greatness. Conversion is always a matter of the whirlwind of grace and the Holy Spirit, and we soon found ourselves in a perfect storm that pulled us out of a sea of irrational chaos and into the Holy See of Peter.

“Out of the Dark into the Light”

Deep down in both the soul of the human person and the soul of a society is the question of identity. All of human happiness and/or misery depends on how this question of identity is answered. When answered, as it has been for the past one hundred years, with the erroneous tunnel vision of radical individualism, separated from one another and from the common good of family and society, we see the slow demise of a once more wholesome society and the human misery that follows. When the answer to our identity is that we must individually create ourselves from scratch, create our own meaning from nothingness, forge our way in life by

guesswork, and pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, is it any wonder that many of our young people are drowning in a morass of moral, sexual, and personal confusion?

I Awoke in a Dark Wood

If you think this an exaggeration, consider U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy's 1992 statement: "*At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.*" Here we see the monumentally impossible task that our young people are coping with, and now in most recent years, via transgender ideology. Young people are now told that they can add their very *being* as male or female to this list of "liberty" that they are called to define. They do so with no grounding in religion, no objective philosophy of the human person, bombarded by a culture run sexually amuck, and with a blurring of even the basic concepts of natural law. Furthermore, they now attempt to "define their own concept of existence" with the pressure of their social media, their school systems, teachers, and medical professionals, all encouraging them to try on any manner of deluded existence except an objective reality. Just make it up as you go along. That's the heart of liberty? No, rather it is the dark heart, the hardness of heart, of license, the black hole of human unhappiness.

"*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, ch  la diritta via era smarrita.*" So begins Dante's journey through hell, "*In the middle of the road of life I awoke in a dark wood where the true way was wholly lost.*" Sadly, due to our degraded misguided culture, many of our young people find themselves in a dark wood, a life crisis, far earlier than Dante did, far earlier than past generations did. In very recent times, a several century's old brewing philosophical and theological lie has finally gurgled to the surface of our Western society. This lie is now so deeply

insinuated and in situated into our society as to twist the ontological reality of the human person into an unrecognizable deformity of grotesque proportions. This is a lie that conjures our young people to hate their bodies, reject their procreative powers, and abhor the very beauty of themselves. This is a lie that tells our young people that God did not make them incarnate male and female as His children in His own beloved image and likeness, but rather tossed them precariously and thoughtlessly into a random body of meat from which they must extricate themselves through sterility hormones and medical mutilation.

We Are Made from God's Stuff

The question is whether or not young people who struggle with body/soul dysmorphia, in a society that promotes a false and evil social and sexual ideology, will find a Virgil, a guardian angel, a guide of light in the darkness, by which they might find their way out of this ideological hell. Will they make it out before the darkness leads them to extremely sorrowful repercussions and deep personal unhappiness? It is my sincere hope that this book, *Transgenderism: A Question of Identity* by author Francis Etheredge, will be such a light. Light is the only way out of darkness; hopefully young people, their parents, extended family members, teachers, social workers, therapists, doctors, pastors, and those serving the common good in government will begin to find many such sources of illumination as found here in this work.

I am reminded of an old story about God and Satan: Satan tells God that if given enough time, he too could create the universe and all that's in it from primordial dust. God takes him up on this challenge and says He will give Satan several billion years to accomplish this. Satan smirks smugly and reaches down for a handful of dust, the primordial stuff. God stops him and says "Oh, no, you have to get your own stuff!" We have been

created from God's stuff, God's dust. Satan understood this and gave up the challenge. But now in our post-Judeo-Christian culture he whispers to *us* that this is not the case, whispers that we are *not* made wholly of God's stuff, but rather we must and are free to create ourselves with our own stuff. We may throw off whatever we have been given by God, abandon the body in which we were created in love, and recreate ourselves. Sadly, we fail to understand that apart from God, we have no stuff.

Distorting Mirrors or a True Reflection?

When my son Daniel was five years old we had an interesting discussion one morning when I asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up. Without missing a beat he announced "A dolphin!" I looked at him in confusion and asked "What?!" He repeated "A dolphin!" I explained "I'm sorry but you can't be a dolphin because you are a boy!" Miserable and angry he responded "But you said that I could be anything I wanted to be when I grow up!" Well, yes, I explained, in primer philosophical terms, yes, within the realm of your nature given to you by God. You have the nature of a boy. And that means you cannot be a dolphin. And that was that. He would go on to learn to swim, boogie board, surf, and snorkel, but he would never be a dolphin. He was to become a man, the only version of his nature possible.

Imagine that instead I had affirmed his delusion of dolphinhood. Imagine that I had taken him to medical professionals and asked that his legs be amputated, that he be given puberty blockers, dolphin hormones, and a prosthetic tail. Imagine that his friends, teachers, and doctors all supported his decision to define his own existence by encouraging this desired delusion. This would be like an anorexic young woman being told that her delusions of being overweight are correct and so we'll gladly give her a gastric bypass to allow her to better starve herself to death. This is the

transgender ideology in a nutshell: take a confused young person who has gender body dysmorphia, affirm and encourage this dysmorphia, act on it with sterilizing chemicals and surgical medical mutilation, and then tout this ideology of the affirmation of delusion from the rooftops as a new and grand freedom of the human person.

This affirmation of delusion begins with an even deeper and more foundational deception that is rarely understood concerning the transgender ideology. This is a fundamental misunderstanding about internal perception and personal identity. Internal perceptions are those inner perceptions of the human person that are incommunicable. What does my pain feel like, what does the color red look like to me, what does a banana taste like to me, and going deeper, what it feels like to be *me*, what my own consciousness feels like, my “I” as known to my reflective self alone? These inner perceptions, which we try in various ways to vaguely communicate to others, are really and fully known only to ourselves and God. These internal perceptions cannot truly be communicated to another human person. So, when I say that “I feel like a girl” what I am really only capable of saying, from inner perception, is that “I feel like myself.” I can relate this feeling to external stereotypes and cultural norms, but I have no way of relating it to or comparing it to any other person’s internal perception because I have no access to those perceptions of others.

When you touch my body, me, you touch me! Constancy and Change

Our internal perception comes through our intrinsic unity with our body. The physical brain which allows our mind and soul to understand the world through our senses, sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, gives us internal and external access to ourselves and only external access to others. We perceive one another, glimpse the soul of others, primarily through the bodily presence of one another.

If a stranger approaches and caresses my arm, it makes sense that I would say “Stop touching me!” If the stranger were to respond, “I’m not touching *you*, I’m only touching *your arm!*” we would think them crazy. My body *is* me. It would be insanity to agree with them, to think some part of my body, in this case my arm, is not *me*. Our body, male or female down to the very cellular DNA level, *is* the mysterious revelation of our self, as created male or female. If I were to mentally malfunction and suddenly think that my arm, my leg, my eyes, or, more privately speaking, my genitalia, are not me, the medical and psychiatric sciences would rationally (until recently) see this as a form of mental disorder.

Think on this! When you touch my body, you touch *me!* Our spiritual-soul-self knows its own nature, not through the inaccessible inner perception of others, but through our own accessible physical-body-self. Our body offers a revelation of our soul. When you physically touch *me* you touch *me!* As the Incarnation of God the Son reveals to us something of the nature of God, so too our body reveals something of our nature to ourselves and others, first and foremost, whether we were created male or female. When you touch my body, *me*, you touch *me!*

When a young boy/man says that he “feels like a girl/woman” or a young girl/woman says she “feels like a boy/man” this can be based only on internal perception disconnected from the given, the created-by-God objective external revelation by the body. This is a mind disorder, a mind that has gravely detached from its body. This erroneous belief, this misperception, has no means of any objective comparison to the incommunicable internal perception inside other persons, and has refused the revelation of its very own accessible body. In other words, no matter the misguided perception of what the person *believes* is perceived inside others, he or she is really only capable of perceiving that “I feel like myself” as revealed, male or female, by the gift of their body. He or she can only mentally conjure up the notion that this *feeling* does not correspond to how

others feel. And he or she must ignore the reality that when he or she is physically touched, he or she *is* touched. The person must distance themselves from their own given objective reality that: When you touch my body, you touch *me*! Rather, in delusion, a transgender person thinks: What is touched, that arm, or leg, or genitalia, is *not me*! Objectively speaking, there's no basis in reality for this claim.

Furthermore, there is personal identity, that deep aspect of the soul that remains constant during our lifetime. While I certainly change over the years, these changes occur in and to a constant me. This inner constant of personal identity allows me to have memories, change for the better or for the worse over time, be held responsible for past actions, and make plans for the me in the future. I can look back on old photographs and say: "that's me!" Have I changed? Surely! But I'm still me. Personal identity is deeply wedded to internal perception. "It's me, still me, always me in here!" Others have no access to this internal perception in me and I have no access to their internal perception. Nor can we toss personal identity off, get rid of it, or exchange it for another me. (Only a severe brain dysfunction can push it into hiding; it is retained after death.) The entire transgender ideology is based on the erroneous belief that we have access to others' internal perceptions and can forsake our own personal identity.

Losing and Finding the Light of Christ

This is the sorrowful ideology that is crushing our society, our families, and especially our young people. This radically individualistic view of the human person apart from God, apart from community, apart from their family, apart from the common good is a misery of current post-Christian Western civilization, as it none too gradually becomes an uncivilization. It was for some time thought that we could continue to have and enjoy the fruits of the Judeo-Christian tree of life without the actual tree itself. It

seemed that the good, the true, and the beautiful, the fruits of science, medicine, law, politics, civil discourse, art, music, that all of these aspects of a wholesome society that upheld the common goods of marriage, family, and children could and would continue without the Judeo-Christian world view that brought them into existence. But this is obviously not the case. We might do well to recall Jesus' words "Apart from me you can do nothing."

This radical individualism, by its very nature, assumes that our identity can be found within ourselves, apart from others. That deep in my soul is a lone *me*. Our young people are told to create themselves within themselves, in a vacuum so to speak, but we are truly capable of personal growth only in love and service to others. I read once of a very successful agricultural study that took place in a third world country. At the end of the several years long project the women of the village were asked via an interpreter how the project had affected their lives for the better. First they were asked about their community, and then about their families. They had lots to say about the benefits they had all experienced. But then they were asked how the project had affected them as individuals. They did not understand the question! They were sisters, daughters, wives, mothers, aunts, grandmothers, friends, community leaders; they were not *individuals*, but rather every moment of their lives was lived in communion with others, their loved ones, their community. As Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) wrote in *God & the World* "It is always the case that a person first recognizes himself in others and through others. No one can arrive at knowledge of himself just by looking within himself and trying to build up his personality from what he finds there. Man as a being is so constructed for relationships that he grows in relation to others. So that his own meaning, his task in life, and his potential are unlocked in his meeting with others...meeting with Jesus, among all those other meetings we have need of, is the truly decisive one. At our meeting with him the fundamental light

dawns, by which I can understand God, man, the world, mission, and meaning.”

Sadly, we now have had three generations brought up, for the most part, separated from our Judeo-Christian roots. We’ve joked about how the nuns became nones, and we’ve taken lightly the possible consequences. But now the consequences of the loss of Judeo-Christianity and the highly celebrated sexual revolution that arrived in its wake have left our society in tatters, our families in ruins, our children confused and often broken. Pope John Paul II coined the term “culture of death” and we would be wise to take note of its reality. While the Chinese people hated their politically enforced one-child policy, many in the United States and Europe self-embraced their own close-to-zero child policy. The brave new Western world has moved from contraception to pornography to divorce to abortion to euthanasia to assisted suicide to homosexuality to, now, transgenderism. We have been culturally instructed to celebrate each event as a matter of relativistic liberty. With no objective understanding of the human person in place, only consent is required for morality.

If, on the other hand, the human person has an objective nature, as claimed by Judeo-Christianity, then it’s time to understand that nature, and to realize that true freedom for the human person has boundaries. Without boundaries it is merely license. License cannot ever lead to human happiness. The human body is one boundary that acts as a safeguard and home for the heart and soul of the human person. Transgenderism is an ideological frontier of evil experimentation on the human person that particularly targets those with other comorbidities, usually young people struggling with many aspects of their identity, often dealing with depression, anxiety, emotional/physical abuse, substance abuse, mental issues, and other family issues. It targets the very boundary of their own body; it tells them that their own body is a source, not of safety but of betrayal. It posits that if there is a god, then this god is one of confusion, carelessness,

and ignorance, a god who could not even get their body right. It directs a floundering young person, not to science and facts, but to political and sexual propaganda. It turns our most vulnerable young people's very bodies into a profitable industry for a post-Judeo-Christian medical and pharmaceutical industry that has long since abandoned its oath to "do no harm."

Time and Space, Light and Love for the Journey

One of the most simple, but perhaps hardest, things to do when faced with a child or young person questioning their identity is to just wait. Just wait. Give them time, space, love, and affirmation grounded in objective reality. Some years back we knew a little boy who at the very young age of four suddenly wanted to be dressed in pink, wanted his nails painted pink, wanted his whole image to be, in our minds, very girly. His family convened a meeting to discuss the matter. The decision was made to be gentle, affirmative of him as a person, not push the issue in any direction, and just wait. What the family learned over time was that this was not about a delusion to become a girl, but a recognition that girls wear more beautiful things than boys do, and this young boy had a deep appreciation for beauty. He soon transitioned, not his body, but his mind and heart, to conform to finding beauty in realistic ways available to his nature as a boy. He just needed time. He needed his family to just wait.

Finally, we are beginning to see Europe pull the brakes on the rush to encourage delusional transitioning and medical mutilation. A return to some basic common sense, the human decency of giving a young person a chance, time and space, to figure themselves out, is emerging. Young people who transitioned (now usually sterile) want to "de-transition", often because they find out that after transitioning, they are on the inside "still me." Internal perception and personal identity remain in a now

traumatized body. Finding no recourse for help, they are beginning to make their voices heard. After the use of permanent-sterility puberty blockers, hormone therapies, mastectomies, and genital mutilations, after having caused a tsunami of human devastation, there finally appears a ray of light in the darkness of this assault on the human person.

This book, by Francis Etheredge, joins that effort of light, to shine the brilliance of faith and reason into many of the aspects of this transgender darkness. Transgenderism affects so many aspects of our society's demise: from an individual's personal bodily mutilation and sterility, to endangering the long fought for world of women's sports, to undermining men and women in marriage and family life, to weakening our trust in the medical world, to compromising the now sexualized public education system. Without a clear, true, objective metaphysical, epistemological and theological understanding of the human person as created by God, as created male and female, as created in love, there can be no flourishing of a society.

We are indeed in a dark wood, but the true way need not be wholly lost! We need only to awaken and make, with Virgil, our journey out of this darkness. We do this in relationship with others and God. By grace. We cannot do it alone. We climb out of this darkness in communion with others. And we pray that one day we might proclaim, as Dante did: "*We climbed, he first, I following his steps, Till on our view the beautiful lights of heav'n dawn'd through a circular opening in the cave: Thus issuing we again beheld the stars.*"