



MAY 2021

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Daniel Walden begins “Gender, Sex, and Other Nonsense” by asserting that the Church has lost its ability to speak credibly and productively about sex and gender. Do you agree? What is the Church saying (or not saying) about sex and gender—and what should it be saying instead?

2. Walden argues that Christians must listen in love to the stories transgender people tell about themselves—especially because to “impose a foreign life story onto an icon of God is to read another person through the eyes of our sin.” In what concrete ways can the Church listen more compassionately to transgender narratives? How might doing so encourage us to see gender “not as a template but as a mystery”?

3. “My actions are me: whatever the range of gender-signifying actions is, my performance of them exactly is my gender,” writes Paul J. Griffiths in “Gender & Identity.” By this logic, Griffiths argues, there’s no definite “gender identity” that can be discovered through introspection. Walden responds that speaking to others about our gender is itself an action—and a morally significant one. How are the two authors’ accounts of what constitutes gender different? Which do you find more compelling?

4. “Gender freedom,” Griffiths writes, is “queering identities, improvising on scripts, lipsticking mustached lips, dissolving the rigidities of local gender orthodoxies, hard and unyielding and violent as they often are, into the blood of Christ.” Does this assertion have something in common with Walden’s idea that all understandings of gender are defective because they were “formed in a fallen world”?

5. Both Walden and Griffiths agree that gender expression can be compared to prayer. How so? Have you ever thought about gender expression in this way before?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

David Cloutier & Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Church & Transgender Identity,” February 2017:
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/church-transgender-identity>

Craig A. Ford, “LGBTQ Catholics Are a Reality,” December 2018:
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/lgbt-catholics-are-reality>

Eve Tushnet, “Is Everyone Female?,” February 2020:
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/everyone-female>

Michael G. Lawler & Todd A. Salzman, “The Catholic Church Must Listen to Transgender and Intersex People,” December 2020:
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/catholic-church-must-listen-transgender-and-intersex-people>

Daniel P. Horan, “What’s the Path to True Dialogue About Gender in the Church?,” June 2019:
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/faith-seeking-understanding/whats-path-true-dialogue-about-gender-church>