

WHO I AM VERSUS WHO I FEEL I AM: AN ETHICAL REFLECTION ON SEX, GENDER, AND INCLUSION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of gender changeability, the postmodernists' proposal of the determination of sexual identity independently of biological considerations, and the moral implications of the freedom to choose how one identifies. Before postmodernism, discussions on sex and gender identity assumed a heteronormative or binary character. Today, arguments, which have cultural and relativistic undertones are being made for a gender-sensitive society that recognises individuals' freedom and right to choose their identity outside the binary framework. This position is often justified by the need for sexual indifference, the freedom to identify based on subjective feelings and inclusion, social participation, respect for human rights, and elimination of discrimination against non-binary genders such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ). We argue in this theological and ethical inquiry, which employs an inductive-interpretative method that the binary paradigm of identity determination corresponds to God's vision for human beings who he created male and female (Gen 1:27). Sex and gender though distinct are God's gift and must not be viewed as strictly products of a cultural construct. This study highlights the need to build a just society where the dignity of all human beings is respected regardless of their ideological proclivities without approving of subjective non-binary genders.

Keywords: Sex, Gender, Sexuality, Binary, Non-binary, Inclusion.

1. Introduction

The description of gender and its categorisations and polychromatic understanding remain a hotly debated issue among psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, moral theologians, and human rights activists,

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especially in the Global North, primarily because of its implications for social relations and the determination of gender roles and sexual identity.

Conventionally, gender was categorised into two, namely, male and female however, in recent times, there have been calls for an expanded view on what gender and sexual identity mean. It is believed that gender ideology is an offshoot of the third phase of feminism, which is founded on constructivism. Feminism does not only focus on the parity between male and female but also proposes the determination of sexual and gender identity based on the exercise of individuals' freedom of choice. In other words, the determination of one's sexual identity does not depend primarily on the biological or physiological features.

While advocates of gender ideology aim at deconstructing the concepts of sex, sexual difference, and gender, which is often considered a social construct, they opine that having a society built on sexual indifference promotes the inclusion of all individuals who do not belong to the conventional male or female genders. To what extent can the ideological drive for inclusion and sexual indifference be sustained? How does gender ideology impact the anthropological foundations of human relationships?

This study attempts to examine the notions of sexuality, sex, and gender within the heteronormative or binary structure and critically reflect on the counterarguments for the recognition of subjective intersex conditions as a way of promoting inclusion, social participation, human rights, and freedom. The anthropological implications of the elimination of sexual differences in favour of gender variability also receive a critical analysis.

2. Sexuality, Sex, and Gender

Sexuality is a fundamental component of the human person which deals with his or her manner of being, manifesting himself or herself, and communicating with others.² It concerns the capacity of an individual to

² Congregation for Catholic Education, *Male and Female He Created Them. Towards A Path of Dialogue on The Question of Gender Theory* (02 February 2019), n. 4. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccat_heduc_doc_20190202_maschio-e-femmina_en.pdf (accessed 08 January 2026). See also, Michael Foucault, *La volontà di sapere* (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1978), 113.

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love, enter into relationships in his or her sexed condition with others and to procreate. The consideration and description of human sexuality is not limited to its biological dimension but also encompasses its multidimensional character. Sexuality deals with human beings considered in their totality, that is, as an incarnated spirit and animated flesh.³ The various aspects of sexuality are biological, psychological, social, and relational.⁴ It is impossible to speak of sexuality without the biological dimension (the difference between male and female on the level of chromosomes, hormones, and gonads), though it is not reducible to sex, as we shall see. The human person is always a unity of body and soul with a sexed body in which and through which he or she perceives the world and lives in it.⁵

Human beings enter into relationships with others and achieve other human values in their corporeal nature which enables them to enter into dialogue with others in an 'I' and 'You' context in which one's 'I' is a response to the presence and needs of the other person.⁶ In other words, corporeity is closely knit with the relational dimension of human beings, who, by nature, and from an anthropological perspective, are beings with and for others.

The indigent nature of human beings, already visible from birth as signified by the first cry of a baby and the last breath of a dying person, suggests that they are always in need of others throughout their existence. Living an isolated life or perceiving oneself as an island is fundamentally antithetical to human nature, which is essentially relational. It is in the context of relationships that human fulfilment is achieved. Being human coincides with the recognition of the presence and value of others, who are welcomed unconditionally without imposing oneself on them. When the other person is objectified, the logic of self-privilege takes over, relationships become

³ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (07 December 1965), n. 14.

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics Persona Humana* (29 December 1975), n. 1. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19751229_personahumana_en.html (accessed 04 January 2026).

⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 14.

⁶ Susy Zanardo, 'Gender e differenza sessuale. Un dibattito in corso,' *Aggiornamenti Sociali* (2014): 379, 381.

transactional rather than fraternal, and the use-and-dump mentality is entrenched.

The psychological dimension projects the emotional and sexual development of the human person in various phases of life: infancy, adolescence, youth, and adulthood. The relational aspect focuses on openness to the other person. Sexuality is truly human and authentic when it is relational, taking into consideration sexual differences. There is a need to specify the implications of this for the gender question: is the determination of gender based primarily on sex attributed to persons by others (medical personnel, parents, and society) based on their biological features, or could they be shaped by the self-perception of individuals, that is, left to the liberal choice of each one without reference to biological composition of an individual?

Without prejudice to the other dimensions of human beings and the inevitability of a global vision of the human person, the biological feature is the entry point for the determination of sex or gender identity. Speaking about human beings and sex and gender identity without reference to their biological dimension opens the path for a revolutionising and redefining of who they are and of what humanity entails. Human beings are not first and foremost products of individuals' subjective thinking, but physical beings created in the image and likeness of God, who are born as persons, not creatures who become persons or whose personhood is ascribed to them by others.

The word 'sex' could refer to two things: first, the description of a human being as a member of a category of individuals with similar biological features; penis in males and vagina in females. Secondly, sex could refer immediately to the conventional sexual act between male and female. The restricted understanding of sex in the second sense is rooted in the Catholic teaching of the unitive and procreative functions of the sexual act, which finds its justification in a marital context. Even though in recent times, some authors have argued that sex should be used to describe homosexual acts, these acts lack procreative capacity, which is a function of the complementary character of the male and female genders.

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Some scholars also believe that homosexual acts result from an inherent nature or pathological condition that is considered incurable or from false education made possible by environmental or social factors such as an experience of sexual abuse as a minor (which could be a critical factor in moral evaluation as it relates to full or partial culpability). It is vital to state that there is no conclusive evidence to show that homosexual tendencies and acts have genetic origins, even though some psychologists argue that homosexual orientation is natural. This position clearly negates the definitive teachings of the Church. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith notes that:

Some people conclude that their tendency is so natural that it justifies, in their case, homosexual relations within a sincere communion of life and love analogous to marriage, in so far as such homosexuals feel incapable of enduring a solitary life. At the present time there are those who, basing themselves on observations in the psychological order, have begun to judge indulgently and even to excuse completely, homosexual relations between certain people. This they do in opposition to the constant teaching of the Magisterium and to the moral sense of the Christian people.⁷

The distinction between the homosexual act itself and homosexual orientation is quite instructive for the moral evaluation and pastoral approach employed by the Church in accompanying individuals who struggle with this condition. It is vital to state that their dignity must be respected even as they are accompanied spiritually and otherwise with the hope that they will overcome their condition as the Church embraces a more contemplative attitude in her pastoral approach and prudential judgement towards them.

Guided by wisdom and careful consideration of contributions of other disciplines, the Church teaches that homosexual relations are intrinsically disordered acts, which are opposed to the finality of conjugal relations, distort the image of the family, and also limit the capacity of homosexual individuals to relate with both males and females in a complimentary

⁷ *Declaration On Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics Persona Humana*, n. 8.

manner.⁸ Care must be taken not to view every homosexual individual as fully culpable for his or her condition, since, for example, in some cases, they are victims of abuse or environmental conditioning.⁹ Partial or reduced culpability does not however imply that homosexual acts are not morally disordered or personal responsibility for them is absent.

For Money and Tucker, sex refers to the biological aspect of a person, while gender deals with the psychological and social dimensions which develop in and through a process of socialisation. Simone de Beauvoir opines that it would be inadequate to describe the female as merely a bearer of eggs and the male as a carrier of sperm, though she accepts the indispensability of the biological aspect.¹⁰ According to her, one of the risks of accepting a reductionist description of male and female is the affirmation of male superiority and female inferiority. Her perspective re-echoes her feminist background. From a moral perspective, the differences at the biological level do not constitute the basis of gender inequality and discrimination in patriarchal societies; rather, an erroneous hermeneutics is responsible for it.

A Catholic moral perspective on sex and gender views them as distinct but interwoven even though some medical conditions and cases cited by Money and Tucker bring to the fore the intricacy of discussing the two concepts solely in a binary context. For instance, in the case of the boy whose genital organ was cut off accidentally during circumcision, his parents consented to a surgical procedure in which a vagina was created for him and also committed to creating a new gender identity for him. The boy grew with all other male features except for the female organ introduced.¹¹ Undeniably, cases of ambiguity at the level of biological differentiation such as intersex conditions could challenge arguments in

⁸ Congregation For Catholic Education, *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders* (04 November 2005), n. 2. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20051104_istruzione_en.html (accessed 05 January 2026).

⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1735.

¹⁰ See Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 57.

¹¹ See John Money and Patricia Tucker, *Essere uomo, essere donna. Uno studio sull'identità di genere* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1980), 74-95.

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support of the binary paradigm however, they remain exceptions that require a different level of moral evaluation.

The concept of sex had a limited scope in the past. Aristotle defined a male as one who generates in another and a female as one who generates in herself.¹² Hence, sex was closely knit with generation in other animals and procreation in human beings, as seen in the writings of saints Augustine and Aquinas.¹³ Also, the connection between sex and sexuality was strongly linked with paternity and maternity. This approach was prominent in the early days of the Church's reflection, especially in the writings of St. Augustine and Pope Pius XI in *Casti Connubii*. Further theological reflections affirmed the necessity of the conjugal act for the good of the spouses within the framework of the unitive and procreative meanings of marriage.

In *Gaudium et Spes*,¹⁴ emphasis is placed on the purpose of the sexual act, as a unique expression of sexuality. It expresses the inseparable link between the unitive and procreative meanings of marriage and promotes chastity, which is a progressive integration of sexual energies and liberation of sexuality from the logic of selfishness. Within the context of marriage, chastity which is understood as both a gift and moral virtue permits sexuality to express itself as force of self-giving love and reflects the intimate union of Christ to the Church.

According to proponents of queer studies, gender should not be mistaken for sex. The two-fold agenda of queer studies include the analytical deconstruction of norms for heteronomy, which connotes a lack of freedom or the subjection of individuals to certain ways of perceiving themselves, and the creation of an epistemological setting for non-conventional sex identities and genders.¹⁵ The introduction of a new way of understanding gender that transcends its perception as partly a social construct marks the

¹² Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans, Arthur L. Peck (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1914), I, 2, 761a.

¹³ Augustine, *Genesi ad litteram*, lib. 9, 3.5. See also, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 92, a. 1.

¹⁴ nn 48-55

¹⁵ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public,' in Laurent Berlant, *Intimacy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 193.

distinct character of queer studies. The idea of flexibility presents gender as a product of choice enabled by freedom that is guaranteed by international human rights instruments. The United Nations highlights the inadequacy of reducing sex to physical features and so adopted the term 'gender' to express the role and status of women and men as social constructs that can freely choose how they identify at any point in time.¹⁶ Butler criticises the call of the Vatican for the suppression of the use of the term gender from the United Nations Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) since it is a pretext for fostering homosexuality and upsetting the normative or binary paradigm of sexual identity.¹⁷

Pope Francis offers a more insight on the link between sex and gender when he affirms their inseparability. From the standpoint of doctrinal development, there has been a shift from an outright rejection of the concept of gender to its inseparability from sex however, gender ideology remains problematic and morally intolerable. Pope Francis teaches emphatically that, 'It needs to be emphasized that 'biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.'¹⁸

The notion of gender as the social and cultural role of sex assumes a distinct character compared to the use of the same term by queer theorists. Gender ideology and gender must not be confused since their content, epistemological foundations, and presuppositions are different. Pope Francis criticises gender ideology 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.'¹⁹

The description of gender as entirely a social construct without the recognition of the biological component and the attempt by proponents of gender ideology to liberalise gender determination based on subjective

¹⁶ United Nations, *Report of the Informal Contact Group on Gender*, 7 July 1995, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/198965> (accessed April 18, 2025).

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 185.

¹⁸ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n.56.

¹⁹ Francis, n. 56.

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feelings underscore the influence of ideological or relativistic perspectives on the determination of individuals' identity today. This proposition, with all its penchant for inclusion, attempts to introduce multiple gender categorisations such as bisexual, transgender, and transsexual, which threaten the inseparable link between sex and sexuality as well as the unitive and procreative functions of sexual acts.

Beyond the negative implications of queer studies, a positive adoption of the deconstruction agenda of queer theorists offers an epistemic tool to make a distinction between morally acceptable normative acts and disordered heterosexual practices such as rape, incest, oral and anal sex, and sex parties and orgies. A critical study of some binary but morally unacceptable sexual practices, which must be continually subjected to deconstruction and reconstruction does not represent a pretext to justify the multiplication of genders.

Gender ideology has implications for the anthropological truth of human beings as sexed beings created male and female in the image and likeness of God. Whereas proponents of queer theory attempt to deconstruct sex by preferring to speak of sexualities and various forms of their expressions anchored in individuals' autonomous choices, the Church seeks to reactivate the indispensability of biological sex features in determining an individual's identity.²⁰ Although sex and gender are no longer regarded as related in modern literature and vocabulary, their conceptual differences do not imply their separability.

3. Sex Identity and Sexual Differences: Anthropological Considerations

The biological dimension played a major role in the determination of sex identity in the past and in many cultural traditions, especially the global North. However, with the evolution of knowledge, postmodern society employs a different approach that considers the social and cultural dimension of the human person and society. Nowadays, at least from the standpoint of queer theorists, sex and gender identity are determined based on personal preferences that are not limited by preconceived cultural, religious or social notions.

²⁰ Beasley et al., *Heterosexuality in Theory and Practice*, 183.

The novelty introduced by contemporary thought is such that sex does not automatically translate to gender identity, and gender identity cannot be reduced to sex. For individuals born as hermaphrodites, a different type of ethical reflection is required. Contemporary literature prefers the use of the term intersex to refer to those who do not fit into the binary classification such as individuals whose genitals cannot be easily categorised, people whose internal reproductive organs are inconsistent with their genitals, people whose bodies are incapable of responding to sex-related hormones, and so on.²¹ However, it is vital to make a distinction (which is essential for an ethical consideration) between intersex individuals and those who freely choose how they identify.

Even though adopting a reductionist approach that presumes the perpetual correlation between sex and gender may seem inadequate, it is important to note that gender cannot be taken in isolation without reference to what is naturally or biologically given. While reaffirming the interdependent character of sex and gender, Simonelli speaks of two phases of the sex-gender dynamics: the first deals with a chronological perception of sex as the basis of gender, while the second treats gender as a model for sex.²²

Sex identity in contemporary reflections encompasses various considerations and concepts.²³ Some scholars argue that gender identity refers to self-perception or psychological awareness of membership of a group of people with similar biological and physiological features, gender role concerns the sexual comportment recognised and expected by society and sexual orientation deals with attraction to same-sex or complimentary sex individuals. Also, some scholars view sex identity as strictly a process of socialisation that excludes what is biologically evident.²⁴ Jobson *et al.*, argue that ‘transgender people are people whose gender identity and/or

²¹ Anne Fausto-Sterling, ‘The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not Enough,’ *The Sciences* (1993): 21.

²² Aristide Fumagalli, ‘Genere e generazione,’ *La Rivista del Clero Italiano*, no. 2 (2014):135. See also, Cristina Simonelli, ‘Teologia, differenza e gender: un dibattito aperto,’ *Studia Patavinia*, no. 62 (2015): 75-76.

²³ Fumagalli, ‘Genere e generazione,’ 134.

²⁴ L. Palazzani, *Sex/Gender. Gli equivoci dell’uguaglianza* (Torino: Giappichelli, 2011), 32.

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gender expression is different from the sex which they were assigned at birth, regardless of their sexual orientation.²⁵ Affirming that sex is assigned at birth requires further elucidation since, in normal circumstances, the biological features of a newborn present self-evident indications that must not be ignored regarding their identity. Consequently, the idea of sex identity assumes a complex character, which must not be overlooked in an attempt to offer a moral perspective on it.

Proponents of gender ideology raise suspicions on sexual differences; rather, they seek to achieve gender mutability, which promotes inclusion and the right of each person to choose his or her gender without hinderance and discrimination.²⁶ Fumagalli and Zanardo refer to this perspective as the culture of indifference, and it serves as the epistemic backdrop for anthropological dualism, which focuses on the separation of personal liberty from corporeal nature.

Proposing the separation of sex from gender provides grounds for making a distinction between one's biological features and one's self-perception.²⁷ It also has implications for the perception of the link between nature and culture, which are often thought to be mutually exclusive. This could negatively impact interpersonal or social relationships. The hermeneutic circularity between nature and culture is not inconsequential in the entire debate on sex and gender identity. A misrepresentation of nature, which in this instance is not considered a pure but mediated reality through culture, partly serves as the basis for an ethical consideration of the link between sex and gender.

From an African perspective, there is perceived opposition to alternative, differing, non-heteronormative, and nonbinary gender identities, basically because of social ethos, which is often influenced by the cultural, religious, and sometimes political realities of a people. Nonbinary or non-heteronormative gender identities receive hostile responses in many

²⁵Geoffrey A. Jobson et al., 'Transgender in Africa: Invisible, inaccessible, or ignored?' *Sahara Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS*, no. 3 (2012): 160.

²⁶ Zanardo, 'Gender e differenza sessuale. Un dibattito in Corso,' 385, 387.

²⁷ Zanardo, 381. See also, Congregation for Catholic Education, *Male and Female He Created Them*, n. 20.

Nigerian cultures since society already operates within a conceptual, normative, and cultural spectrum which presents categorised ways of determining sex and gender. The biological features that distinguish an individual as male or female and are vital to inclusion and belonging constitute the foundation of sex and gender determination in the African context, especially in cultures where age groups are considered an essential component of social integration and communal living.²⁸

In 2009, about 96,000 people of the 48 million South African population were living with a condition of true hermaphroditism.²⁹ This discovery further highlights the complexity of sex and gender determination in Africa and calls for reflection on the intricacy of the condition and social response and responsibility towards those who live with it. In several African societies that strongly uphold the binary sex and gender classifications, hermaphrodites or intersex people often face rejection, discrimination, risk of harm by others, and exclusion.

One of the hallmarks of a free and fair society is its ability to employ a more contemplative approach that, on one hand, seeks to, for example, distinguish individuals who freely choose to be homosexual or transgender from those who are conditioned by incomplete biological differentiation (such as intersex individuals), abuse or environmental influence. On the other hand, society has a moral responsibility to accommodate everyone and respect their dignity, regardless of their sex or gender identity, without compromising its values or making exceptions the norm. This could sometimes be a herculean task considering several strict legislations against homosexuality and penalties for those who practice or promote it in about 32 African countries. Same-sex marriage is prohibited in Nigeria, and whoever contravenes the law risks 14 years of imprisonment. There are concerns among human rights activists that such a law violates the basic rights of homosexuals and attempts to criminalise their right to expression, association, and assembly.

²⁸ Samuel O. Okafor, 'The Indigenous Concept of Sexuality in African Tradition and Globalization,' *Global Journal of Reproductive Medicine*, no. 6 (2018): 1, 1-5.

²⁹ News 24, '96 000 South Africans may be intersexed,' <https://www.news24.com/life/96-000-south-africans-may-be-intersexed-20120721> (accessed 20 May 2025).

4. Gender Ideology and Multiplication of Genders

Gender ideology focuses on the deconstruction of the idea of gender to accommodate other genders that do not fit into the conventional binary categorisation of male and female. In addition to advocating for equality and respect for all genders, advocates of gender ideology also suggest that gender identity should be left up to the free will of each individual rather than being conditioned by social and cultural norms.³⁰

The perception of gender as an entirely social construct independent of the biological element overlooks the character of the human being as a sexed being and permits further possibilities of freely choosing one's sexual orientation and identity. In other words, by dislodging sexual differences between male and female, homosexual relationships are equated with heterosexual ones.³¹

The deconstruction agenda of gender ideologues promotes the subjective affirmation of gender identity without reference to nature and sociocultural influences.³² Feminists trace the perception of women as defective males, inferior, and weak vessels to the recognition of sexual differences. The perception of human identity is often shaped by social, cultural, and religious factors that could sometimes lead to an erroneous conclusion.³³ Sexual differences do not devalue human beings in their sexed state; rather, they constitute the framework for building interpersonal relationships that recognise the presence and value of others and the need to respect them.

There is a growing interest in and condemnation of gender inequality, discrimination based on gender and the exclusion of individuals who are non-binary, especially at the international level. The question of inclusion is closely knit with human dignity and rights.³⁴ Discrimination in all its

³⁰ Fumagalli, 138. See also, Zanardo, 'Gender e differenza sessuale. Un dibattito in Corso,' 383.

³¹ Fumagalli, 140.

³² Fumagalli, 141.

³³ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Male and Female He Created Them*, n. 11.

³⁴ United Nations Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979, Art.1. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments->

forms such as gender, racial, political, economic, social, cultural, and religious, and in all spheres, both public and private, often results in exclusion and restriction of participation in social and political life. A lack of recognition of the equality of all human beings and their equal dignity regardless of their sex or gender ‘identities’ continues to threaten social harmony and peace.

Taking part in community and civic life and having a say in what happens to them is a principal desire of citizens that is grounded in the interdependence of human beings.³⁵ Inclusion as a criterion of judgement, motivation for action, and principle of social engagement contributes to integral human and social development. Attaining social integration and development is possible through insistence on respect for human dignity and rights.

Societies that promote inclusion have a dual responsibility: first, finding creative ways to include those that have been excluded from communal life based on social ethos and second, eradicating the legal and structural frameworks that exclude particular sets of individuals or groups due to their age, colour, sex, and race.³⁶ The question of how far societies should pursue and achieve inclusion in relation to their core ethical and social values receives divergent views. While some scholars argue for an unlimited application, some others are more conservative in their approach by proposing inclusion as a principle of social interaction that does not override the ethos of a people.

Since the difference between male and female is not always clear on the biological level, further considerations need to be made for an ethical evaluation. Money highlights a few exceptional cases such as authentic hermaphrodites whom he describes as *herms* because they possess one testis and one ovary, *merms* (male pseudo-hermaphroditism) which refers to individuals with testes and some aspects of the female genital features,

mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women. (accessed 25 March, 2025).

³⁵ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016), n.190

³⁶ United Nations Human Rights, ‘Empowerment, Inclusion, Equality: Accelerating sustainable development with human rights,’ 4. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/MDGs/Post2015/EIEPamphlet.pdf> (accessed 15 May 2025).

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and *ferms* (female pseudo-hermaphroditism) who have ovaries and some parts of the male genital organs without testes.³⁷ The widespread attention that gender theorists are receiving concerning the multiplicity of genders is gradually shaping and expanding linguistic constructions to promote inclusion. For example, the pronouns he/she, his/her, and him/her are being replaced with they or their.³⁸

From the exposition made so far, we have seen that the gender problem raises questions on whether the sexed body is a natural phenomenon, a social construct or determined by individual choice. If we accept that we are entirely determined biologically, then there is a risk of falling into naturalistic reductionism. On the other hand, if we maintain that gender is a social construct, then the sexed body is considered non-essential or accidental. Furthermore, leaving the determination of sex identity to the whims and caprices of individuals exposes society to the dangers associated with sexual indifference such as identity crises for voluntary intersex individuals and social crises occasioned by the conflict of interest on the part of society that must create a balance between maintaining its ethos and welcoming everyone without discrimination.

5. Conclusion

Freedom is a vital characteristic of human beings. From a faith perspective, it is a gift from God and the context in which human-divine and interpersonal relationships are realised. The exercise of freedom has been a perennial problem, especially in the contemporary era, where the affirmation of rights continues to take centre stage in social discussions and interactions. Discussions about sex, gender, and sexuality and the role of human freedom necessitate a call for the creation of ethical structures that will guide human beings in the exercise of their freedom and in the recognition of its limitations. Absolute freedom antagonises the truth which it ought to serve. It seeks to deny its intrinsic link to truth, thus portraying liberty as freedom from truth rather than freedom in truth.³⁹

³⁷ Anne Fausto-Sterling, 'The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not Enough,' 21.

³⁸ Fumagalli, 140. See also, Zanardo, 380; Money and Tucker, *Essere uomo, essere donna. Uno studio sull'identità di genere*, 94. See also, Congregation for Catholic Education, *Male and Female He Created Them*, n. 12.

³⁹ Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humane* (07 December 1965), n. 14.

Contrary to position of advocates of gender ideology that sex and gender determination should be according to individuals' preferences, it is maintained in this paper that corporeity is not an accidental but essential component of human beings, who were created male and female by God. As such, the biological component of an individual must not be ignored in the description of his or her identity since it is the basis for the other aspects of human sexuality.⁴⁰ The sexual differences between males and females do not automatically translate into discrimination against the female gender or others who, due to incomplete biological differentiation, do not belong exclusively to the binary categorisations. The wrong interpretation of sexual differences is responsible for gender discrimination.

The global North seems more receptive to the idea of gender flexibility based on its peculiar social, political, and cultural context. Many African societies are often hostile toward nonbinary genders. There is a need for a social and pastoral response that promotes, respects, and defends the dignity and rights of everyone without necessarily accepting an indiscriminate multiplication of genders. The call for inclusion by queer studies theorists finds its justification to the extent that it promotes participation and human solidarity, which is not only a moral principle but also a virtue. The inclusion of intersex individuals and nonbinary genders can be achieved without necessarily deconstructing sex and gender, which are inseparable expressions of God's creative initiative. This paper does not claim to have exhausted the theme. Further reflections are needed regarding the development of epistemic bases, laws, and policies that will guide African societies in relating with intersex individuals and nonbinary genders without undermining their dignity or the social and religious heritage of the people.

⁴⁰ Francis, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, (19 March 2016), n. 56.