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by NCR Staff

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Listening to transgender Catholics requires learning about what they want us to understand about their lives, says Jesuit Fr. James Keenan in a recent commentary for NCR. Following are letters to the editor from readers responding to the article. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

The suggestion that the church consult science on the reality of transgendered humans was a wise suggestion. Knowledge about human workings is progressing daily in the field and laboratory.

This suggestion follows another. The church needs to do research into its own belief system founded on scripture and tradition. It needs to highlight beliefs that are nonfactual. This would not be unique since long ago, science proved that the Earth wasn't the center of our solar system, an obsolete teaching of the church emphasizing the primacy of mankind.

Benefits will accrue to the church by partnering with science.

DONALD F. CUDDIHEE, SR.

Greer, South Carolina



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What one priest learned from listening to transgender Catholics is an excellent opinion piece. More like it are needed. Jesuit Fr. James Keenan hit all the nails on the head. A church that thinks it knows it all won't listen because it has a long tradition of not doing so. This is a dimension of clericalism.

Talking down to the laity is the church's MO strongly embedded in its DNA such that it attracts and promotes men to the clerical state who carry its banner; indeed, makes greater inroads into an isolated know-it-all psyche. This disallows them to consider synodality and other pastoral attributes encouraged by Pope Francis.

It's true Francis speaks of gender ideology. Francis also speaks of his own imperfections. How can an 85-year-old man wrap his mind around transgenderism along with 100 other pressing issues he confronts on a daily basis? He notes his imperfections are not the church's. He does preach accompaniment, listening, going to the peripheries and non-judgementalism.

The importance of clerics is overstated. As a former mental health professional, I couldn't speak of my religion in my work settings. However, the church does have a network of mental health providers and/or can develop one to meet the needs of transgender, and indeed, all Catholics.

This is the non-clericalized church Francis envisions. This is where synodality can open the door to a newer, more wholesome church meeting its members where they are, holding onto their hand and accompanying them on their pilgrim journey in the world while inside the church.

MICHAEL J. MCDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

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Every person is composed of three interactive components —sex, gender, and relationship. Sex is biological; gender is societal (cultural); relationship is interactional. Each of these three is a multi-dimensional continuum and no two people are alike.

For instance, six major factors make up the biological components of sex. These include chromosomes, genes, external genitalia, internal genitalia, endocrine system (hormonal) actions and nervous system actions. Gender is separate from — though related to — sex. Gender is also composed of numerous factors, including clothing, job preferences, societal expectations, etc.

Relationship includes everything from our interactions with family, friends, sales persons at the store, unknown persons on the phone, choice of life partners, to everything else, etc. These points are, of course, related to both sex and gender. Most components in most people are fluid — meaning they are not static (the same) throughout life. These things are not simple. Everything is really quite complex and it is all inter-related.

Our clergy — particularly our bishops and above — need some basic biology lessons.

(Dr.) ROBERTA M. MEEHAN

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I strongly concur with Jesuit Fr. James Keenan that pastors and cisgendered Catholics need to listen to and, as he emphasizes, learn from transgendered Catholics. But when it comes to "gender ideology," I wonder if we shouldn't spend time examining our Holy Father's criticism of this supposed "ideology."

When considering that possible understanding of the pope's agenda, I am reminded of how trans-affirming people in the English-speaking West seem to limit our understanding of transgenderism to how the transgender experience is understood in the English-speaking Western world. There seems to not be much of an effort in seriously exploring the transgender experience in countries where transgenderism is more prevalent.

On a related note, it interests me that Keenan clearly links transgenderism to gender dysphoria, which is seemingly becoming less and less fashionable to do in the trans movement of the English-speaking West. Is not this growing trend against so-called "transmedicalism" evidence that there is a kind of philosophically postmodern gender ideology at play in at least some trans discourse? I doubt that most of our prelates are aware of the push against "transmedicalism," but the influence of this tendency in the movement would seem to serve their point.

I'll conclude by stating my hope that our pastors, including Pope Francis, will follow Keenan's example. Also, when listening to trans people they should privilege the voices of trans people from the margins, such as trans sex workers and trans people of color.

JEFFREY JONES

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