

The Culture Says / The Truth Is

To help guide conversations, this section presents ideas or statements popular in the current culture, alongside true statements that flow from Catholic teaching. The first section on definitions and first principles is important to understand before beginning any conversations on Section II.

Often, the reasons for disagreements in the specific topics in Section II are based on disagreement over the principles in Section I. For example, Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger argued that abortion and eugenics were good for human flourishing, while the Church teaches that abortion and eugenics are morally wrong. How can there be such disagreement? The difference is based on unspoken assumptions about human nature and the meaning of life. If you are beginning with the assumption that individuals exist to serve society, it makes sense that the less capable, less intelligent, or otherwise “unfit” should be removed. In this distorted world view, removing less “desirable” traits will lead to “human flourishing.” It is clear, however, when you begin with the true principles, that every human life is precious, specifically willed and cherished by God.

When seeking to understand Church teaching about sex, gender, or any other topic that might present a challenge, it’s often helpful to look over these basic definitions as a starting point, in order to see if it might be the root of the difficulty.

Section I: DEFINITIONS AND FIRST PRINCIPLES

	The Culture Says:	The Truth Is:	Notes
Human Nature	The meaning of life is to maximize happiness.	The meaning of life is to get to Heaven.	
	Our value comes from our talents or achievements.	Our value is infinite as persons made in the image and likeness of God.	
	The individual exists to serve the economy.	The economy exists to serve individuals.	
	People are naturally good.	People are inclined to sin but capable of virtue, and need God's grace to live as we should.	

	The Culture Says:	The Truth Is:	Notes
The Role of Feelings	Our feelings should guide our choices.	Our intellect should guide our choices; feelings are subordinate to our intellect and will.	
	Love is a feeling.	Love is an act of the will. It is the free choice to will the good of another.	
	Good things are those which feel pleasant, or bring feelings of happiness.	Good things are those which help us be what God created us to be.	
	If it feels good, it must be right.	Our feelings can lead us in the wrong direction, and to sin. It's important to keep our feelings in check, under our intellect and will.	
The Meaning of the Body	Our physical body isn't really who we are. It's more like a "shell" for our true self, which is who we are "inside."	Every human being is a unity of body and soul. Our body, male or female, is a fundamental part of who we are.	
	Our bodies are ours to do with whatever we want.	We should care for our bodies in light of the reality that they are gifts from God, and Temples of the Holy Spirit.	
	We should use whatever medical technology is available to make our body do what we want.	We should use medicine and medical technology to restore the body to how it was designed to function.	
	If something occurs in a lot of people, it is natural and therefore good.	The fact that something is common does not make it natural or good. Natural things are those which help us achieve our purpose: bodies to function as designed, and souls growing closer to God.	

Section II: SEX, GENDER, AND MARRIAGE

The Culture Says:	The Truth Is:	Notes
Sexual differences are just social constructs. Our culture expects and so produces different things from girls and boys.	Girls and boys are equal in dignity, but inherently different.	
Gender is fluid, it can change.	A person being male or female cannot change, even if someone has surgery, takes hormone therapy, or has other interventions.	
We choose our gender. Sex is “assigned” at birth but later, as we get older, we decide whether we are truly male or female.	Although a tiny minority of people are born with physical abnormalities, we are all either male or female in our DNA. This includes those who, for some unknown reason, identify themselves a person of the opposite sex. This belief can result in severe psychological confusion and pain for the person, as well as for the person’s family and friends.	
It’s a sign that a boy is trans if he wants to do traditionally feminine things, or vice versa.	Boys can have interests that are considered “feminine” and girls can have interests that are considered “masculine.” It does not make the boys into girls, or the girls into boys.	
The purpose of marriage is the happiness of the spouses.	The purpose of marriage is for the spouses to help each other and their children get to Heaven.	
Marriage can be ended through divorce.	Marriage is a life-long, indissoluble bond.	
Love is a feeling.	Love is an act of the will. It is the free choice to will the good of another.	

The Culture Says:	The Truth Is:	Notes
You shouldn't marry unless you feel you've found your soulmate.	You do not have a single soulmate you must find for your marriage to be happy. All spouses will have conflicts. In marriage, you promise to love your spouse in good times and in bad, for as long as you both live.	
No one should stay in a marriage where they are unhappy.	Marriage can be a cross, but Jesus offers the spouses the graces they need to endure in their marriage.	
The Church says married couples should stay together even in abusive situations.	This is false. The Church does not teach that a wife should live with an abusive husband or vice versa. When needed for the sake of safety and to seek healing, couples should separate. The Church prays for their healthy reunion.	
Children are resilient and not harmed by their parents' divorce.	Removing a mother or a father from a family destabilizes the home and puts children at higher risk of poverty, incarceration, substance abuse, sexual abuse, and suicide. Children raised by their married parents are more likely to thrive physically, achieve more education, and enjoy a higher socio-economic status.	
Everyone has the right to be a parent.	The tragedy of infertility causes despair, grief, and tension for many couples, and the Church extends them special concern in this cross they bear. But the truth is that a child is not a right.	
IVF is a good approach for couples to take to infertility.	IVF takes a consumeristic, scientifically-controlled approach to reproduction, and always involves the intrusion of a third party into the sacred bonds of married love. Also, IVF creates many embryos that will be destroyed or otherwise denied a chance to live their lives. IVF is completely opposed to the way God has given us to bring a baby into the world, and does not respect the sacred quality of human life.	

Section III: TRANSGENDERISM

The Culture Says:	The Truth Is:	Notes
Those who identify as the opposite sex should be affirmed in that decision.	Manhood and womanhood are realities. They are not feelings, no matter how sincerely those feelings are experienced.	
Trans people should be celebrated in a special way.	Those who struggle with a confused sense of sexual identity must be lovingly accepted as persons created in God's image with the same dignity as any other person. Further, as Christians, we must pray for peace in their unique struggles and support them with Christian charity, all the while upholding the truth of God's plan for life and love.	
Someone who believes they are the opposite sex should be encouraged to have surgery or take hormones to change their body.	We should treat those experiencing gender dysphoria with compassion, and it is never compassionate to lie to someone. Just as we would not withhold food from someone with a body image disorder, we should not encourage someone to mutilate or poison their body to align with a mistaken belief about gender. We should lovingly encourage and help them to accept their body including their identity as male or female.	
Men who identify as women should be able to compete in women's sports (and vice-versa).	The reason we have separate sports for girls and boys is because of the inherent differences between males and females, and the physical advantages most boys have over most girls. It is true that some of the strongest women are stronger than the weakest men. But on average, men are bigger, stronger, and faster than women, making meaningful competition between them unrealistic in most sports. Girls deserve teams of their own to fairly compete.	

The Culture Says:	The Truth Is:	Notes
Boys who identify as girls should be able to use girls' bathrooms and showers (and vice-versa).	Girls need private spaces of their own. Boys experiencing gender dysphoria deserve to be treated with compassion, and so do girls. They deserve places of privacy where they can be free of the gaze of boys/men while they are showering/changing clothes.	
We should use peoples' preferred pronouns, even if it requires us to call a biological female a male and vice-versa.	Saying a male is female or vice versa is a lie. God calls us to tell the truth, but we must always tell it with charity. We must find charitable ways to express ourselves that do not require us to break the Eighth Commandment.	

Section IV: HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVITY

The Culture Says:	The Truth Is:	Notes
Love is love.	Love is the choice to will the good of another. This love was modeled for us by Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. Through Him, we have life. Human beings image God not only as individual persons, but most perfectly as male and female in a common union (communion) of life-giving love.	
Our feelings of attraction define who we are.	We are not defined by our feelings. The identity and dignity of all human beings come from being made in God's image and likeness. As baptized Christians, we are adopted children of God. This is our identity.	
Homosexual acts are an intimate expression of affection that are no different from heterosexual activity.	Homosexual acts are always closed to the possibility of generation of children. They do not originate from the complementarity of the male and female bodies and sexuality. Therefore, homosexual acts can never be full expressions of the total self-giving love found in marriage.	
The Church unjustly singles out gay people and calls their experience sinful.	Every person is called to chastity. Homosexual inclinations are not sinful, but homosexual acts are. Just as heterosexual attractions can pose certain challenges at various stages in life, homosexual attraction can present a burden to those who experience it. Those who experience homosexual attraction are called to uphold the same standard of love and chastity in their particular state in life as all Christians are. They are assisted in this through prayer, friendship, and sacramental grace.	
People who feel attracted to others of the same sex should not be told they should suppress their desires. It's too much to ask anyone to live without sexual expression.	There is no such thing as a situation that requires us to act immorally. There is always a virtuous choice to be made, even if it is a very difficult one. We will often find that the virtuous choice is the hardest choice and we need God's grace to do the right thing. But with God's grace, nothing is impossible.	

Section IV: GAY MARRIAGE

The Culture Says:	The Truth Is:	Notes
Love makes a family.	A nuclear family, which was chosen by Jesus to be born into, is a biological reality.	
Government should define who is a family.	Government recognizes the family, a pre-existing reality. The family should be protected from, rather than defined by, government intervention. Except in cases of crisis such as death or abandonment, children should be raised by their parents because of the biological reality of parenthood.	
The government should recognize gay marriage.	The purpose of government is to promote the common good. Traditional marriage promotes the common good because it is best for human flourishing. Marriage results from the intention of the couple to form a unitive covenant which, by definition, is ordered to procreation. By contrast, the government has no interest in romantic relationships between same-sex couples who cannot procreate. At its root, marriage involves the rearing of children: "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory" (CCC 1652).	
Everyone has the right to be a parent.	Parenthood is not a right. Within a family, parents are more rightly said to have duties than rights. It is the child who has a right to his or her natural parents. When tragic circumstances such as death or abandonment occur, adoption is a loving response.	