

National Catholic Prayer Breakfast, March 14, 2023

Remarks by Mary Rice Hasson
On receiving the Christifideles Laici award.

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Thank you! Thank you for this beautiful award and this honor, and the chance to be with you today. I'm especially grateful to the Ethics and Public Policy Center, my intellectual home, and our President Ryan Anderson, who has led the way in speaking the truth boldly, with unfailing grace and charity.

And thank you to all of you, for your presence, your talents and gifts. It's inspiring to be among you...and we need inspiration. Because in today's culture, we've got our work cut out for us.

I want to speak to those challenges for a moment, and then share my reason for hope.

The past few years, I have crisscrossed the country, speaking to priests, bishops, teachers, parents, students--whoever will listen--about the truth of the human person: "male and female he created them." I speak too about the lies and harms of gender ideology.

This issue has come home to Catholics. In every parish, every diocese, there are Catholics with loved ones who identify as transgender.

For some families, the transgender "coming out" is like a tsunami that roars ashore in the dead of night, smashing dreams and shattering relationships, before finally sweeping the most vulnerable far out into dark, dangerous waters.

The harm is devastating, the pain unimaginable. Especially when a young person turns to hormones or surgery, changing a healthy body into a broken one, all in a futile quest to become someone else.

These families need our prayers and support.

The changes of the past decade have been dramatic and far-reaching. It's important to understand why: Let me give you a bit of history.

In 1996, a small band of "transsexual" activists gathered in Houston, Texas, to approve a short document with a grandiose title: "The International Bill of Gender Rights." According to the International Bill of Gender Rights, every person has...

- the right to self-define an identity regardless of sex
- to modify the body as desired
- to demand that others accept and validate one's chosen identity

- and to form sexual relationships, build families and acquire children, as desired.

It was 1996. Nobody took them seriously. Nobody cared. This International Bill of Gender Rights was a giant nothingburger. A fringy-document by a fringy group.

Fast forward to today. The very same claims, so outlandish in 1996, are embedded in United Nations Human Rights Council [documents](#), global [strategies](#), and in US [policy](#).

What happened? How did we get from 1996 to today?

Two words: “culture” and “capture.” The ideologues own the culture. And they own the culture because they have captured - and now dominate - our institutions, including media, business, academia, communications, government, education, healthcare, and most religions (except for the Catholic Church). And they have leveraged the power of these cultural institutions to force wide-scale cultural change.

The easiest way to change a culture, though, is not to change the hearts and minds of middle-aged adults like us, but to form the hearts and minds of our children, teaching them to accept gender ideology as the gospel truth. Tragically, they are succeeding,

The most damaging influences on our youth are social media and government schools. It’s impossible for the 40 hours a year a child spends in religious education to override the impact of 1200 hours a year spent in a school culture that teaches and celebrates a false anthropology. Not only in high school or middle school, but in elementary school, year after year.

We can see the impact in the numbers: [Gallup](#) reports that 20% of Generation Z (our older high school students and young adults) now identify as members of the LGBTQ community. By comparison, only 14% of Generation Z identify as Catholic.

Among high schoolers, nearly 1 in 10 ([9.2%](#)) identify as transgender.

Drawn in by this false anthropology, burdened with the false freedom to “create themselves,” young people don’t know who they are. It’s hardly surprising.

Pope Benedict observed that “when the freedom to be creative becomes the freedom to create oneself, then necessarily the Maker himself is denied, and ultimately man too is stripped of his dignity as a creature of God...”

No wonder Pope Francis recently [called](#) gender ideology “one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations.”

Where is our hope? Our hope lies in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This moment – when gender ideology is flooding our culture – is an opportunity. A tremendous opportunity. Our young people are seeking meaning. They want to know who they are. Indeed, they *must* know who they are.

And we have an answer to give them:

“You are a son or daughter of the Lord. You are loved incredibly. And God has a plan for your life. Trust him.”

Yes, it will take a generation to restore a sound anthropology to our social fabric and renew the culture, because what was lost over several decades cannot be recovered overnight.

And it cannot be done unless we reclaim the education of our Catholic young people. Nearly 80% of Catholic children are educated in government schools, where they are catechized in a false anthropology that renders their hearts and minds less receptive to the truth about the human person and the reality of the God who loves them.

We can change that today. We must. Catholic children need a Catholic education because they need God. And they are the future of the Church.

In *Christifidelis Laici*, Pope St John Paul II said that the laity, and women in particular, are called to shape the moral dimension of culture -- a culture worthy of the human person.

That’s my calling. That’s our calling.

The Church, and our children, need us. In closing, let us pray and respond to the task at hand by recalling the words of the Blessed Mother to the wine stewards at Cana: “Do whatever he tells you.”

Thank you.