



**LGBT+ Catholics
Westminster**

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The Rt. Rev. David Oakley
Bishop's House
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Dear Bishop Oakley

We welcome CBCEW's affirmation of trans peoples' dignity in the recent document, 'Intricately Woven by the Lord'. However, there are a number of issues with the document which we fear may serve as more hindrance than help to attempts to include trans people in the Church and wider society.

First, it addresses transness under the label of "gender identity theory". Yet this account of transness is far from the most robust one available. It does not reflect the current state of the field in gender or trans studies, nor does it reflect the lived experience or self-understanding of many trans people themselves. In adopting this frame, the document not only lacks intellectual charity, but fails to engage properly with the true object of its concern.

Second, its dismissal of all trans medicine on the basis that it harms the body fails to recognise existing Catholic teaching on medical ethics, under which harm to the body alone does not necessarily render a procedure illicit. Combined with the fact that trans medicine incorporates a range of different treatments with different objects and effects on the body, these questions present a complexity and uncertainty that is more properly the subject of ongoing discussion, rather than univocal and definitive statements such as can be found in 'Intricately Woven by the Lord'.

Third, and perhaps most pressingly, we are concerned about the document's rejection of not only medical but social transition, as well as its prescription that "the language of gender ideology" ought not be used in a Catholic institutional context. This leaves very little space for trans people to exist within the spaces governed by these norms. While this is problematic in itself, it will also be an obstacle to providing adequate care (pastoral or otherwise) to trans people who will inevitably find any group or organisation that institutionalises these principles inhospitable.

This issue will be felt especially keenly in cases where individuals are particularly reliant upon care by Catholic organisations, such as schools or hospitals. These norms will put those institutions at odds with trans people - indeed, when they are at their most vulnerable - and will therefore be an obstacle to providing adequate care for them. It is also questionable how they are supposed to be implemented while meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

On this point, we worry that the document leaves little space for any pastoral approach other than ad-hoc (but no less harmful) conversion practices through institutional resistance to any manifestation or accommodation of transness. We are sure that this cannot be an adequate reading of the bishops' aspirations towards the pastoral accompaniment of trans people, and we would appreciate further clarification.

Finally, we are concerned at the timing of this document, which comes shortly after the publication of both the DDF's Dignitas Infinita and the Cass Review. Both documents require a period of careful reflection, whereas 'Intricately Woven by the Lord' (not least because it construes itself as a response to the former) simply risks contributing to the atmosphere of heightened response to each.

We appreciate and share in the bishops' recognition of "the need for careful discernment and delicate, compassionate pastoral accompaniment" for trans people. In this spirit, we would welcome the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the bishops in this area, to help ensure that their aspirations towards the adequate pastoral accompaniment of trans people is achieved.

Yours sincerely

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