



June 26, 2023

## The Cause of the Present Disorder

When I was a young graduate (1962), abortion was still illegal, and unborn children were secure in their mothers' wombs. The sale and distribution of contraceptives was illegal in Pennsylvania where I grew up. Physicians still devoted themselves to healing their patients rather than helping them kill themselves. There was no gay agenda, no transgender movement. There was no LGBTQ+ lobby. Families were still generally intact. But so much of that has changed in the span of a single lifetime – mine.

What has led to this present disorder? For one thing, we have turned our backs on the Judeo-Christian tradition on which our nation was founded and by which it flourished. But we have even turned our backs on the noble classical traditions which were also our legacy. Five hundred years before the birth of Our Lord, the pagan physician Hippocrates composed an Oath which guided physicians for almost three thousand years, but which has been jettisoned in our own day. With that Oath physicians swore before God and family not only "I will do no harm." The Oath was also quite specific: "I will give no one a lethal medicine even when asked for it." "I will never give a woman anything to induce an abortion." Graduates of medical schools no longer take the Hippocratic Oath leaving our own country with almost 700,00 abortions every year and with ten states that have now legalized physician- assisted suicide.

As St. John Paul II declared in his encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, we now find ourselves in a Culture of Death. Innocent human life is now destroyed with impunity. He wrote that when abortion and euthanasia are legalized "the State is no longer the 'common home' where all can live together on the basis of principles of fundamental equality but is transformed into a tyrant State, which arrogates to itself the right to

dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenseless members, from the unborn child to the elderly . . .”

We have entered a period when, as Our Lord said, evil is called good and good evil. St. Thomas Aquinas, with all his profound intellect, was able to state the obvious in a manner that could be easily understood. Apparently until now. St. Thomas taught that “Truth is the conformity of mind to reality.” But we live in a day when it seems reality itself cannot be grasped. We live in a time when five members of one of our most elite social institutions, the Supreme Court, in a decision known as Obergefell, tried to overturn the very order of nature itself by declaring that a marriage can exist between two individuals of the same sex.

St. John Paul II spoke to such situations: “The appearance of the strictest respect for legality is maintained . . .but what we have is only the tragic caricature of legality.” Marriage and family is the most fundamental, indeed, the most essential, unit of society. Yet even it has fallen victim to incessant attacks from the Tyrant State.

The United States now has the lowest marriage rates in its history. Recent estimates show that more than 40 percent of births in the United States occur outside of marriage, up from 28 percent in 1990. Almost 18 million children live in homes without fathers. Sociological studies have shown repeatedly that considerable benefits accrue to children growing up in an intact, two-parent household. Adolescents in such homes have higher levels of academic achievement and are less likely to exhibit problem behaviors in school compared to peers living in homes with single mothers.

In 2014 I had the privilege to visit with Pope Emeritus Benedict in his residence in the Vatican Gardens. After we exchanged pleasantries, he looked at me and said, “The next great challenge the Church is going to face is gender ideology, and it will be the ultimate rebellion against God the Creator.” I was surprised by his comment, but I now see he was prophetic. We have been hit with a tsunami of transgender ideology, and Catholic health care institutions are being sued because they refuse to perform mutilating surgeries on men who want to be surgically altered to look like women or women who want to appear as

men. In the United States those under 25 who identify as transgender has doubled since 2017. In the United Kingdom, the number of young people seeking gender transitioning rose by almost 6,500% between 2009 and 2022.

An institution in Sweden, the Karolinska Institute, published a report in 2011 which was of a long-term study of up to 30 years of people who had “transitioned”. After 10 years the study found they began to have emotional problems. Most alarmingly, their suicide mortality rate was 20-fold above the comparable non-transgendered population.

All of these developments are to be anticipated in an increasingly secularized society. As the Second Vatican Council said in *Gaudium et Spes*: “When the Creator is forgotten, the creature itself grows unintelligible.” In our day, the Creator has been forgotten, and we now live in a world which is simply unintelligible.

When the Creator is dismissed, we presume to become the creator. We can turn men into women and women into men. We can create three-parent embryos. We can assemble designer babies. We no longer know what a man is or what a woman is. If we no longer know what such concrete realities are, how will we possibly be able to conceive abstract realities such as justice, fortitude, or charity? When the Creator is forgotten, the creature itself becomes unintelligible.

Abortion, same-sex marriage, physician assisted suicide, transgender ideology. All of these are attacks on the very image of God. The image of God is killed in abortion and assisted suicide; it is defaced in so-called same-sex marriage.

The challenges are there but we can be of good cheer because we are Catholics. We are the ones who love to embrace reality for what it is. We are the ones who love to embrace the opposite sex rather than trying to turn ourselves into it. We are the ones who enjoy the goods of the created order, which can be the best antidotes to a disordered world. Catholics are the ones who kneel in adoration before Him through whom all things were made. Catholics kneel before the One who grants intelligibility to His creation as He calls it into existence.

The forging of a new Christian society is going to be no easy task. But the future is ours as we remain faithful to reality and the God who created it.

**John Haas**

President Emeritus of the National Catholic Bioethics Center