

## **Catholic Answers Forum thread on transgenderism – edited for clarity**

**#1 Jan 7, '09, 4:10 am**

**Zoe Brain**

Religion: Agnostic Deist with tendency to commit Buddhism

### **What is the Church's position on the Intersexed and Transsexed?**

I've been trying to get some guidance here for several years. Requests for assistance are acknowledged, but not answered.

To explain, people born with Intersex conditions have bodies that are neither 100% male nor 100% female. Transsexuality is a kind of Intersex where the neurology, the brain, is mismatched with the rest of the body, or most of the rest of the body, as Transsexuals often have other Intersex conditions too.

The plain fact is that most if not all organisations that view transsexuality as a moral evil on religious grounds are not aware of any distinction between transsexuality and homosexuality - except to believe that transsexuality is ultra-homosexuality, the most perverse of the perverted and the ultimate in moral degradation.

Unfortunately few have any regard for medical science, or science in general. When one believes the bible is literally true, inerrant, and the sun orbits an earth 6000 years old, any appeal to science is likely to be seen as yet more evidence of evil-utionist conspiracy.

Oddly, the Christian mainstream is one of the few religions that should be more understanding, not less, of Intersexed people (and I include Transsexuality there, as the medical evidence indicates that's what it is). The first line of Matthew 19:12 mentions the Intersexed - those eunuchs born of their mother's womb - and Isaiah 56:3-5 states categorically that they're exempt from the normal rules of male and female behaviour. They must do what is pleasing to God and keep the Sabbath - that's it.

There are those who say that men are born men, women are born women, and Intersex and Transsexuality are illusory. There is no Gender, only Sex, and Sex is defined by what you look most like at birth. They fall silent when confronted by medical conditions such as 5alpha-reductase-2 deficiency (5alpha-RD-2) and 17beta-hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase-3 deficiency (17beta-HSD-3) where apparently female infants masculinise so they become apparently male by their mid-20's. About 2/3 accept or even welcome the change as a cure for their existing transsexuality, while to the remaining third, it's a descent into nightmare - they become transsexual women with male bodies.

Perhaps such people, like the blind man in John 9:1-12, are there to show that transsexuality is a medical and biological, not a moral issue. That God does not make mistakes when He decides that some should have bodies of uncertain gender, or have brains of one gender and bodies of another. And that neither condition is the result of moral corruption.

However, all that aside, what exactly is Church teaching on the subject? This is especially important in view of His Holiness's recent statements demanding respect for Church teaching that there is only male and female, and that the idea of "gender" rather than strict corporeal sex at birth is a danger to Humanity and contradicts God's natural order.

**#2 Jan 7, '09, 3:09 pm**

**Ruthie**

**Religion: Catholic**

Hi, Zoe.

If I have used any terms that you find offensive, please believe that it is not my intent - and give me the inoffensive terms so I can use them in the future.

I believe the Church has not really dealt with the scientific aspect of transgenderism. At least not officially. The fact that there are people whose gender chromosomes are not either XX or XY has not gotten a lot of publicity. There is also the widespread confusion between transgender and transvestite. It would be nice if the Magisterium had a charisma that kept them from ignorance, but...

But the Church does teach that we are not to mutilate ourselves. At present, "sex-change" operations are considered self-mutilation.

I can find no teaching against cross-dressing, except that it is usually considered a lie. I can certainly see that it is not a lie for the truly transgendered.

The Church is absolutely firm in teaching that sex is only for married couples consisting of one man and one woman. But...

Is a truly transgendered person male, or female, or (as the science suggests) something in between? If they are neither male nor female, does this mean they can't marry?

Or can they marry if they choose to live as one sex? Since a one-gendered bisexual can marry if they choose to be faithful to their spouse (give up the homosexual aspect of their condition), why couldn't a transgendered person do the same?

I hope the Church is considering these things. The National Catholic Bioethics Center published a paper in 2005 addressing sex change operations, but I can't afford the membership fee that would allow me to view it.

God bless you, Ruthie

**#7 Jan 7, '09, 6:20 pm**

**Zoe**

Thanks Ruthie! None of your terms were offensive per se, and if they had been, any offense would have been negated by the spirit of Charity that so obviously moved your post.

Some of the issues that crop up, and in many cases our knowledge is relatively recent (i.e. less than 15 years old).

Chromosomes, while a good guide, are not reliable, Various Intersex conditions can cause people with 46xx (usually female) chromosomes to be not merely apparently male, but able to father children.

Rather more conditions can cause someone with 46xy(usually male) chromosomes to not merely appear female, but be able to bear children. Sometimes this takes medical intervention (as with Swyer syndrome), but sometimes not.

There are people who are mosaics or chimerae, with different cell-lines in their bodies. Some may be mixes of 46xx and 46xy, or mixes including 45x or 47xxy etc.

Some men with 47xxy chromosomes have become biological fathers: but unless they are 46xy/47xxy mosaics, this takes medical intervention. Some women with 47xxy chromosomes have given birth (often to 47xxy daughters) without medical intervention.

Most Intersex conditions result in sterility, but many result in apparently normal men or women whose chromosomes are the opposite of that expected.

To label a woman who has given birth "male" simply because she has 46xy chromosomes would be not merely absurd, but uncharitable. It would cause her marriage to be annulled as a forbidden "same-sex" relationship, and put her children in a parlous legal position, both in temporal and canon law.

However, this has actually occurred in some jurisdictions, though without Church approval. Or disapproval.

There are some terribly perplexing cases, and often people get different advice. Often such advice is of the form of stern commandments, which makes things difficult if two commands are contradictory, but both threaten extreme measures of punishment if not obeyed. And obeyed in silence.

Motto for the day:

It's not that I hope God's on my side - I'm more worried that I should be on His side.

My thanks to all, more later,  
Zoe

**#8 Jan 8, '09, 1:51 am**

**Zoe Brain**

As regards transsexuality... the evidence is that gender identity is formed at an early age in a direction dictated by the way the brain developed in the womb. This development depends both on genetics, and the hormonal environment during pregnancy. For it to go "wrong" requires both one of a number of genetic anomalies (we've only identified a few of these) and also some environmental anomaly.

Environmental anomalies on their own happen all the time, and normally have no effect. The Genetic anomalies on their own don't cause problems, and may indeed be mildly beneficial in one way or another in other areas.

So although we are not exactly born boys and girls, we are born potential boys or potential girls, and trying to go against those natural potentials to the opposite is futile. As well as being morally suspect, to say the least.

These potentials are dictated by the development of the limbic nucleus, a primitive part of the brain concerned with emotions, instincts, ovulatory cycles, sense of smell and the like. Men and women differ in their thinking, or rather, their instinctive behaviour and emotional feeling due to differences in this area. So while most of what we think of as "gender-specific behaviour", blue for boys and pink for girls, skirts versus trousers, most of that is a cultural artefact and nothing to do with neurology, some behaviour is.

Transsexuality happens when the development of most of the body is in a pattern consistent with one sex but the brain is developed in a pattern consistent with the opposite sex.,

I believe the Church's teaching is that we are all born male or female (leaving aside the very Intersexed). No amount of surgery can change this essential aspect of a person, it can only change the appearance.

Transsexuals and their medical teams believe that although it's not exactly true to say we're born male or female, close enough. By age 7 or so (and often by age 2) gender identity is formed, and trying to intervene in this is futile. Transsexuals don't believe the surgery they seek changes them in any way. It just restores function, and aligns brain and body.

So both parties believe the same thing, essentially. The difference is that the Church uses different criteria than the neurology to judge sex - but they're not terribly sure what those criteria are. Sometimes it's chromosomes (when the genitalia is ambiguous). Sometimes it's genitalia (when the chromosomes are ambiguous). Sometimes it's just the documentation, and regardless of bodily or neurological form, if the church records say you're male, you're male, even if you have become pregnant. (And so are thus guilty of sodomy [sic] with another man too...).

In the Church's view, if someone is born with obviously female genitalia then they are female, no matter what. This causes problems with those men with either 5alpha-reductase-2 deficiency (5alpha-RD-2) or 17beta-hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase-3 deficiency (17beta-HSD-3), both of which cause a natural sex change to male later in life.

The Church's aversion to "sex change surgery" also causes problems for these people. We have a terrible dilemma:

Do we say to a boy "It says girl on your birth certificate, you looked like a girl at birth, so we're going to castrate you and surgically alter your genitalia back to the way it was." If we don't do this, we're faced with a woman (in the eyes of the Church) who is capable of impregnating other females!

Or do we say to a girl "No, we can't help you stop this terrible change that is disfiguring you, because sex change surgery is impermissible".

You see... only 2/3 of the people who have these conditions welcome the change. They're boys, neurologically, so this natural process cures their transsexuality. But 1/3 are girls, and without surgical and hormonal intervention, will become transsexual.

The Charitable thing to do is to go with the neurology, and see "sex reassignment surgery" as merely "genital reconstruction surgery", which cures a congenital anomaly. It's Charitable - but is it Right? Current Church doctrine does not recognise neurology as playing any part, and states that is a form of mental instability or sexual perversion, despite all the evidence that contradicts that..

At least, I think so. The statement on the subject was sent to Bishops sub secretum and only parts have leaked out. It appears not to have mentioned Intersex at all, and especially not 5ARD or 17BHDD, which Theologians prefer to ignore, or deny they exist.

Most Intersex conditions are surprisingly common. Even if one condition is as rare as 1 in 40,000, that means over 7000 people in the USA have that.

My own condition is one of the rare ones. We know lots about the 99% of "natural sex changes" that are from female to male, but almost nothing about the <1% that go the other way.

I've tried for over 3 years now to get a straight answer from the Church even to such a simple question as what sex I'm now supposed to be. Medically I've been diagnosed with "severe androgenisation of a non-pregnant woman" that has partially naturally resolved but the Church's view may be entirely different.. My letters and e-mails are usually acknowledged, but have never been answered. Neither has my question been tackled by "ask an apologist" here on the Forum.

I want to act in accordance with Isaiah 56:3-5, but when I get different answers (or no answer at all) to the question about what is pleasing to God, then I must rely on my own conscience - and being a sinner, I'm terribly fallible!

**#9 Jan 8, '09, 8:21 pm**  
**Ruthie**

Thank you, Zoe, for your honesty and courage.

Is there hope of some kind of brain scan technology that would be able to detect the differences in neurology? Then there would be hope that the Church would be able to develop something.

One more comment. You said, "Current Church doctrine ... states that is a form of mental instability or sexual perversion, despite all the evidence that contradicts that."

What the church says is that it is "intrinsically disordered." While it looks like an insulting statement, it is not. "Disordered" in modern use means "sick," but in this case it means "outside the order God intended." A person who has no feet is "intrinsically disordered," because feet are "ordered" to walking - that's what God intended when He made them. He never intended for a female brain to be in a male body!

Thank you for the new information. God bless the scientists who are looking into these things, and may their work be fruitful.

God bless you,

Ruthie

**#10 Jan 8, '09, 9:45 pm**  
**Zoe Brain**

Honesty? I try to be honest - the only risk is of deceiving myself first. As a Scientist, I try to be objective. As a Human, I fail sometimes. Courage? No, in comparison with others who have lost their sight, or worse, lost their child, no, I'm not courageous. I have no more courage than someone in a burning building deciding to jump to the waiting net below. Who then gets pushed out.

Quote: Is there hope of some kind of brain scan technology that would be able to detect the differences in neurology? Then there would be hope that the Church would be able to develop something.

Oh yes, the technology exists, the effects are not subtle but quite obvious, and have been for some time,

Here, from "An Examination of the use of fMRT for diagnosing Transsexuality" Quote:

In men, the limbic system and upper regions of the hypothalamus, the amygdalae and the insular cortex were activated substantially more strongly. "We confirmed this finding in the comparison between the heterosexual men and women of our Cohort", said Gizewski.

This specifically male activation of the limbic system was not found in the transsexual sample. Under fMRT, the pictures corresponded rather accurately to those of the female sample.

Radiologists can now confirm what transsexuals report - that they feel "trapped in the wrong body" - on the basis of the activation of the brain when presented with erotic stimuli. There is obviously a biological correlation with the subjective feelings.

Quite a lot of work has been done in this area now, mainly in Germany and Switzerland. That article was published nearly 3 years ago, in *ArzteZeitung*, the German Physician's Journal. Since then, more work has been done, extending the sample

to include Female to Male Transsexuals, and with other stimuli known to cause sexually-dimorphic responses. That is, men think one way, women another. The initial findings have been strongly confirmed by these larger samples.

Many thanks for your compliments. I wish I were worthy of them. All the best, Zoe

**#11 Jan 8, '09, 10:35 pm**

**Zoe Brain**

One more comment. You said, "Current Church doctrine ... states that is a form of mental instability or sexual perversion, despite all the evidence that contradicts that."

What the church says is that it is "intrinsically disordered." While it looks like an insulting statement, it is not. "Disordered" in modern use means "sick," but in this case it means "outside the order God intended."! I'm afraid that that interpretation, while quite reasonable on its own, doesn't accord with other, earlier statements on the subject.

*Zoe pasted here John Norton's article which I deleted since it is already attached.*

**#12 Jan 8, '09, 10:38 pm**

**Zoe Brain**

As Transsexuality universally appears at ages before puberty, usually between ages 2-8, this invalidates all marriages of Transsexual people, even if they have borne or fathered children. It seems inconsistent with the ruling that the surgery is merely superficial cosmesis.

It would void my own marriage too, for I'd picked the name "Zoe" at age 10, when I thought I'd grow up just like other girls. But I swear in front of God and Man that I didn't have the courage to transition. I tried to be the best Man any Woman could be, and had not my body been female all the time, and not changed as part of a natural process, I'd still be doing it.

I'd be doing it for my marriage, and my son. His conception took considerable help as I was never wholly male in body, but enough to have a partly functional male reproductive capacity, even though it took syringes, etc. rather than the normal means.

Not that it's anyone's business, but my marriage is a chaste relationship now of course. The Love, Agape not Eros, remains though.

I've made two unbreakable vows in my life: one to adhere "in sickness and in health", with no cavils about what medical conditions counted and what didn't. And a vow to bring up my son in the Catholic Faith, even though I myself am an unbeliever.

Pardon me, I am writing from the heart now, as a woman and not a scientist. It is only now, when my situation has through the Grace of God been cured, that I can realise how utterly, utterly Hellish my life used to be. How terribly wrong, how utterly perverse and un-natural it was. In compensation, I've been gifted with the realisation of how good it is to have a mind and body that finally are whole, healthy, consistent and right. Others who take that for granted will never know the joy I take in every day. And I wonder, why me? I don't deserve this. I don't even believe in God. Why when there are so many Transsexual women out there did I get this 1 in several million natural cure?

So I do what I can to help others not as blessed as I've been. To educate, to inform, but also to seek what is right when I'm not sure myself.

OK, I'll now don my objective scientist hat again.

Hopefully, in view of the biological differences in the brain, the Vatican will conclude that Transsexuality by their own definition - ..a psychic disorder of those whose genetic makeup and physical characteristics are unambiguously of one sex but who feel that they belong to the opposite sex. - does not exist. However, it appears that neurological differences for some reason don't count. They mean genitalia here, nothing else. Why? Bad Timing.

It is ironic that when the Congregation was just finishing their work in the late 1990's, the first hard evidence that this was definitely a biological rather than psychological problem was just coming in. Before then, it was thought to be biological, as it showed none of the usual signs of psychiatric disturbance, but a minority opinion still clung to the conservative view that it was merely "Mental Illness". The major proponent of this view was Dr. William [sic] McHugh, advisor on sexual mental health to the Vatican. He advised the Head of the Congregation at the time, Cardinal Ratzinger, now His Holiness Pope Benedict.

It is extremely disturbing that the document on the subject remains secret. It is most unfortunate that Dr. McHugh's views, which are now regarded as "fringe" and completely discredited, were the last words His Holiness heard on the subject.

We have no idea if this document has been superceded because of the later evidence, or whether some or all of the ideas are still current. We only have 3rd-hand information as to what the contents are. Our questions are met with silence. And though my Italian is imperfect, my reading of His Holiness's words to the Curia indicate that my existence is both a threat to humanity, and contrary to God's natural order. I'm just glad he wasn't speaking ex Cathedra.

Hence my question.

Thanks to all who have written in reply, by the way. Ruthie's compassionate and logical responses in particular. That was most kind of you, and I'd be most interested in anything you or anyone else can do to help or teach me in this area.

God Bless (for whether I believe or not doesn't matter if He exists),  
Zoe

**# 17 Jan 11, '09, 1:52 am**

**Zoe Brain**

It was originally believed that my Intersex condition made me infertile, but not sterile. I was quoted a figure of 100:1 odds against, but those are pretty good odds for anyone intersexed..

Had it been realised that I wasn't a relatively mildly intersexed man, but a terribly, extensively, severely intersexed woman, then attempts at reproduction would have been discouraged as almost certainly futile, the odds against incalculably remote. So rare no decent estimate could be made.

My Son exists. So it was providence that I was misdiagnosed.

Isaiah 56:3 tells the majority of us who are sterile not to complain about being "a dry tree". Well I wasn't, not quite, incapable of bearing fruit. I had one chance, and took it. There was only one drop of water in the well though. Almost dry.

My belief is firm that any dogma or policy that states my child should not exist is in grave error, and a faulty exegesis of scripture. It is true that Intersexed people are not subject to the normal strictures placed on men and women, because

many are physical impossibilities. But I believe that to the extent that they can conform, they should attempt to, though not be criticised should they fail.

Thanks for your post, by the way. Sometimes true charity requires pointing out the rules we must live by, and not just requesting, but demanding obedience to them. In this case, the situation is unclear, and we must do as best we can to do the right thing.

**#18 Feb 18, '09, 9:33 am**

**Gretta1**

**Religion: Catholic**

Zoe,

Just a couple of observations that I hope might be helpful to you. I am a canon lawyer with a JCD, and I'm hoping this post might help. First is that you are obviously very concerned about how the Church defines you, and how that definition then affects all of your other relationships. But I think that in your case (and in the cases of those like you) we must look toward a broader understanding of Canon Law to find answers.

First, understand that the law of the Church is based on European code, not the common law as found in the US and in Australia. This is important because it gives us a different legal mindset than we are used to. Church rules are written broadly to encompass the largest number of people. But when legal anomalies arise, they are dealt with either by specific exception, or by allowing there to be pastoral provisions made for those for whom the law doesn't fit. It is evident that your situation is one of those anomalies that is not envisioned in the law. Thus, you are getting contradictory pronouncements on this precisely because your situation does not fall into one of the Church's neatly defined categories.

Second, in Church law, laws which are restrictive are to be interpreted strictly (c. 18). You write that the Vatican has defined transexuality as a "psychic disorder of those whose genetic makeup and physical characteristics are unambiguously of one sex but who feel that they belong to the opposite sex." But look at the definition - and you may be right to say that these conditions do not in fact exist. Read the definition strictly as one is supposed to do under canon law. Does it apply to you as defined? If not, then the restrictions or limitations also do not apply to you. This is not just sophistry - it is truly the way the law works. You are not obliged to stretch their definition to fit you. Rather, you are within your rights to say that definition does not apply to me because I DO NOT FIT that definition. Thus any pronouncements made by them based on THAT PARTICULAR DEFINITION or consequences from that pronouncement do not bind you. Those rules only bind those that fit that definition.

So, it seems to me that what the Vatican has made a determination on is if you are "unambiguously" of one sex, but "feel" you belong to the other, then this definition applies. But it seems to me that if you are medically "intersexed" that by definition your gender is ambiguous. Applying another canonical maxim, "you are not bound to the impossible", you can only clarify your gender as much as it is possible to do so, using the best available information you have at that time. Neither God nor the Church can require you to do more than that.

So ultimately, I don't think there is an answer to your question. The Church has made a pronouncement that it does not want people who clearly are of one gender to change to another because it is considered mutilation. However, it has not made pronouncements for those whose gender is not biologically/genetically consistent or determined. Your situation puts you into a theological and canonical gray area where morally you are simply called to do the best you can do with the information you have. And consider that the Pope when he speaks is speaking as someone who has a Code understanding of the law and theology - he is making pronouncements that are meant to be applied to 99% of his people. I suspect that if you were to present him with the facts of your case and of those in your similar situation, he would understand that you require an exception because you and your circumstances are exceptional! The scriptures you quoted in your posts are evidence that even in scripture there are those to whom that 1% exception applies.

You have obviously had a very difficult path to travel, without there being a clear road. And it sounds to me like even though you are not sure in your belief, it still means a lot to you to have the Church understand your struggle. Unfortunately, it does not appear that much officially has come out on the subject. That may be because it is such a complex issue that it defies an easy "rule" on the subject and that each case must be dealt with as a legal exception. That would be consistent with Church practice.

But please also know that just because there are not clear answers for you, it does not mean that the Church does not care about you. You are profoundly loved as God's child regardless of your situation. Your son is loved as a gift from God - and is never to be thought of as a grave error. You are not bound to the impossible - he was conceived under the circumstances of what you understood about yourself at that time. I wish you and your family every blessing, and will keep you all in my prayers.

Gretta

**#19 Feb 18, '09, 6:53 pm**

**Zoe Brain**

Gretta, thank you. You've helped more than you know.

Your post was rational, charitable and humane. I confess I'm in tears, because although I can cope with difficulties - I see them as a challenge - I've had precious little rationality, humanity, or charity shown to me by either legal or religious authorities. We accept that as normal, as our lot in life, Many have worse crosses to bear after all.

So when someone acts with such kindness, we don't know how to handle it. Thank you..

God Bless, Zoe

**#20 Feb 19, '09, 2:44 pm**

**Gretta1**

Zoe, Since you are a scientist I figure you don't mind delving deeper into a question. Like Ruthie I am not sure what are proper terms, so if I offend it isn't intentional but from ignorance. I think that there is a logic to what the Church has said/not said, but only if you understand "church logic," a closed system where particular rules govern but those rules don't necessarily translate outside this system.

The rules: 1. The Church defines its own terms to mean what it says in a very technical sense. Thus one can't assume that it is using terms in the same way that one would otherwise, and we often misinterpret what the church means when we apply our understandings to its very technical language. 2. The Church legislates only for those things that they are sure of, presuming that it will be speaking to a worldwide audience. 3. There are many issues on which the Church remains silent. Silence in Church law means that there is not a certainty that one can make a general rule. Therefore, one does not legislate until one has moral certainty on an issue. On those things which the church remains officially silent, one then must resort to one's own conscience, laws governing similar situations, and the advice of a spiritual director/confessor to determine the morality of such an issue. 4. All laws must reflect the Church's purpose, the salvation of souls.

Look at the definition through that lens: "A psychic disorder of those whose genetic makeup and physical characteristics are unambiguously of one sex but who feel that they belong to the opposite sex." If this translation is correct, and knowing that Father Navarrete is an excellent canonist, this definition was no accident. I believe that it was carefully drafted to exclude those whose gender is medically ambiguous. This specific definition of transexuality was intended to cover only

those with no biological/medical issue with their gender determination. Thus, if you fit this limited definition, a person who is medically of one gender but for some "psychic" reason wants to change (e.g., I'm female but I want to be male b/c men have more opportunities), the Church holds this to be a mental disorder that can be addressed through other means.

Now think about this using the rules above. They have defined "transsexual" in a very limited way, based on a very clear distinction of having an "unambiguous sexual determination." But, I believe that it WAS INTENTIONAL that this definition did not include those people whose gender identity issues are biological. Why? Because as you have pointed out, the issues are so complex with so many variations that it is legally/pastorally impossible to make one statement encompassing all of these permutations. Thus, instead of attempting it, the Church is remaining INTENTIONALLY silent. And even more heartening, this silence comes AFTER they concluded their study on the issue - thus it would seem that they rejected Dr. McHugh's argument that all issues of transsexualism are mental in origin. Thus, the theologians decided that the best and most pastoral way to proceed was to not address the broader issue, but to only deal in a very limited way that aspect of transsexualism that they believed they could address.

We common law folk want things defined. We find pastoral peace in being given clearly defined rules telling us what is ok/not ok. So we are deeply uncomfortable living in legal ambiguity. However, this is not the understanding of those drafting Church laws. Their equally pastoral response is that the Church does not restrict your freedom unless it absolutely needs to - thus you are free to exercise your own conscience for those issues on which the Church does not speak. It isn't the way WE look at law, but it makes sense once you see how they are looking at things.

Now, how does that translate into something practical? That is complicated and often depends on your priest (who may not be sympathetic towards your situation). Canonically, you are not supposed to alter your baptismal record. And in keeping with legislating for the majority, there isn't a category for "ambiguous." So, you have to make choices that either don't fit or require you to reveal a considerable amount of your personal medical history to a church official.

Another limitation of this system is that for those of us who like certainty the silence seems particularly cold. But I really think that this is such a complex biological issue with such profound life ramifications that giving the individual the freedom to trust their consciences is the best they can do. Unfortunately, this often leaves the individual to cope on the local level with authorities who may have less of an understanding of the issue. However, better that than attempting to make a single theological pronouncement that by necessity takes a complex issue and simplifies it to its most absurd so that one can have a generalized rule on the subject.

I hope that knowing HOW the Church thinks might give you some peace. It won't make dealing with local folks any easier, but you can have some sense that the greater Church trusts your innate sense of what is right - and that it is not condemning you for a biological issue that you did not create.

And most importantly I reiterate much like other families, your larger Catholic family loves you. You are a loving person who is doing your best under exceptionally difficult circumstances. Families are not always the most sensitive to our brothers and sisters needs, and some families can be downright insensitive to each other. However, we have a loving Father who is very proud of His creation, and a Brother/Savior who was willing to die for you. So, you must be something pretty special! Gretta

**#21 Feb 20, '09, 5:44 am**

**Zoe Brain**

Thank you so much, your cogent explanation was as clear as it could be.

I don't consider myself worthy of the name "Christian", as I lack faith. I have made two vows in my life though, ones that I take seriously. As seriously as life and death.

One was my marriage vow. There was a clause about "in sickness and in health", with no cavils or exceptions made about which medical conditions counted, and which did not.

The second was the vow I took at my son's christening, to bring him up in the Catholic faith.

My marriage is chaste: my partner is not a practicing Catholic, unlike my mother or sister, yet we cannot bring ourselves to break our vow, whether the Church allows it or not. We have no intention of troubling them with the question, living as sisters more than anything else, and both devoted to the son whose birth was so unlikely.

That some people, people who are well-meaning and trying to do the Church's bidding, don't understand, misinterpret, and in general don't follow your line of reasoning is regrettable. It's also inconvenient for me personally. Every few months, I must travel hundreds of kilometres to see an endocrinologist, because those nearby won't treat "people like me" on religious grounds. I've been ordered to divorce by a senior governmental official or face withdrawal of human rights, and told to withdraw my son from his Catholic school, the usual that many Intersexed people face, Far less than most, in fact.

That though, while upsetting, is not really important. In this life, we all have to suffer some injustices, some great, some small. What is important is that I should do the right thing, as I see it. That means not just "following my conscience", because I'm acutely aware of my own fallibility, but making my best efforts to ascertain what is the Right. Then have the gumption to do it, or give it my best attempt, considering that I'm all too fallible.

As for others in the Church who are not Doctors Juris Canonici, and who persecute me out of the best of motives, how can I blame them? Someone who went through far worse said "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do". If someone who is Perfect can say that, when faced with worse, how can someone as imperfect as I am not follow that example as best she may?

Your argument is impeccable. I cannot fault your logic, and it concords with such other research as I'd done. It makes sense, and I need little convincing. I was afraid though that my tentative conclusions might have been due to me seeing what I wanted to see, not what is.

Again, my thanks. You exemplify 1 Corinthians 13, a text I try in my faltering way to live by.

May I ask you when you pray for me to redirect your prayers to my son, and also to the many many Intersexed people who have been treated far, far worse than I have. That's almost all of them.

For those whose bodies were mutilated by well-meaning surgeons when they were infants.

For those forbidden from ever seeing their children again.

For those recovering from rape and brain-injury from assault.

For those shunned by their parents and their Church.

For those dying because medical treatment was refused to them.

And especially for those in the depths of despair who are in danger of suicide.

If I am worthy of a scintilla of blessing, please re-direct it to them. Their need is so much greater than mine, I've been already blessed far more than I deserve.