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# Marquette's Gender Regime

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# FIRST THINGS

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## MARQUETTE'S GENDER REGIME

by  
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Working in my Marquette office one afternoon in the spring of 2010, I heard unusual sounds coming from the normally quiet lawns outside my window. I was surprised to see a modest assembly of students and professors preparing to march in protest. Against what? Minutes later, an email arrived informing me that the university's then-president, Robert Wild, S.J., had voided a contract extended to Jodi O'Brien to join us as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Though the contract had already been signed, Fr. Wild—perhaps under external pressure—decided that O'Brien, a partnered lesbian whose research included queer studies, was not an appropriate choice to represent our mission and identity.

Although an ordinary person with a passing knowledge of the moral teachings of the Catholic Church would think such a decision obvious, the department chairs in the college soon gathered and voted almost unanimously to censure Wild's decision. The press, meanwhile, demanded an explanation. On the defensive, the university allegedly paid a considerable sum in order to break the contract. Officials were soon exercising themselves to demonstrate their concern for equitable treatment of gays and lesbians. The university would initiate projects, courses, conferences, and the like to explore issues of sex and gender! The clear implication was that change would come, though slowly. Marquette would get with the sexual-liberation program so that something like the O'Brien affair would never happen again.

Since 2010, the campaign for sexual diversity at Marquette has advanced rapidly. Last year, the university announced the expansion of the former Gender and Sexuality Resource Center

(established in the wake of the O'Brien dustup) into two new initiatives: a Center for Gender and Sexualities Studies and an LGBTQ Resource Center. How much funding has been increased has not been disclosed. We also now have an Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, which offers faculty and staff awards for excellence in, yes, “diversity and inclusion.” Again, how much this will cost hasn’t been revealed. We do know, however, that funds have been promised to support the development of new courses that advance the cause. A faculty fellows program in diversity is also in the works.

“Diversity” and “inclusion” are vague and uncertain terms that can mean almost anything. Here at Marquette they have become code for challenging Catholic sexual morality and pushing forward a gender ideology that denies that human beings were created as male and female in the image of God. Attempting to instill communal meaning through the new quest for diversity, Marquette news releases breathlessly announce that the struggle for civil rights begun by Martin Luther King Jr. is now being fulfilled here by the campaign for the inclusion of sexual minorities.

How is that going? A 2015 campus “climate survey” reported that most of us find Marquette a great place to work. However, the survey also noted experiences of “exclusionary, hostile, or offensive conduct.” The main problem of “exclusion” was neither race nor class. Instead, experiences of “exclusion” were reported most often by those who self-identified as L, G, B, or Q. (The “T” option was not given.) The survey also indicated that traditional Catholics experience intimidation and exclusion, especially when the talk turns to sexuality. These results suggest that “social justice” at Marquette has been refocused in an intense even if mostly subterranean struggle over Catholic sexual morality.

After the survey was released, a group calling itself “Concerned Catholics” convened. Its members challenged university leaders to take concrete steps to strengthen Marquette’s Catholic identity. They are convinced that the Catholic commitment to moral truth and the dignity of every person offers the right framework for balancing moral clarity with concern for the well-being of LGBTQ members of the Marquette community. As yet, the group has received no

official response to its proposals. Meanwhile, recent announcements from university leaders indicate that they are increasingly comfortable affirming LGBTQ ideology. Their language remains cautious about explicitly endorsing revisionist accounts of sexuality and the human person. It is nevertheless clear that Marquette's leaders do not share the grave concerns about LGBTQ theory expressed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and other representatives of the Church's magisterium.

Senior officials endorse LGBTQ programs without qualification, casting doubt on their readiness to affirm Church teaching. In fact, the level of enthusiasm for LGBTQ causes casts doubt on their willingness to tolerate anyone who thinks otherwise.

Imagine, for example, a new freshman who has recently completed an invigorating course on John Paul II's Theology of the Body in her parish. After orientation week at Marquette, will she feel free to express her newfound understanding of the nuptial meaning of the body? Or will she fear that her words will be treated as exclusionary and hateful?

I'm afraid the questions answer themselves. The problem with the new inclusion, of course, is that it's not inclusive, nor can it be. It is simply a new way of defining sexual morality that masquerades as a bureaucratic, therapeutic project of "inclusion." At Marquette, it's clear that this project seeks to displace traditional Catholic accounts of sexual morality.

The new gender regime at Marquette quietly encourages students to understand themselves in terms of this new morality, one in which there's no place for natural law. "Assigned" gender, that is, one's sexual identity as confirmed by physicians at birth, is now open to question. Each student is encouraged to assess his comfort with his assigned gender, and to consider the available options. This is no mere classroom exercise. Marquette now offers students the option of identifying both a "legal" and a "chosen" gender in their official personal data. Legal gender is limited to male or female. But "chosen" gender options include (yes, it's a drop-down list) "intersex," "transgender," "non-binary," and, for the questioning, "unknown."

Charitably interpreted, the provision of these options suggests a readiness to welcome each person, no matter how he/she/? may define him/her/?-self. This is understandable, perhaps even laudable. It is impossible, however, for Marquette's enthusiastic embrace of the latest gender mumbo-jumbo to mean only that. It signals unmistakably the adoption of a libertarian, gender-studies approach to self-definition that treats our bodies simply as malleable means of self-expression. Choice and self-definition are all-determining, an approach that obviously contradicts Catholic teaching.

Students are not the only ones being subjected to the new regime. Official webpages and announcements sometimes identify people with their "preferred pronouns" in parentheses (including the newly minted "gender neutral" pronouns "ze" and "zir"). The smorgasbord of sexualities is fast becoming official policy at Marquette.

Few are willing to speak against this nonsense. The new gender regime rides on the strong currents of celebrity culture, while Washington's "soft power" deters resistance. Grants or certification necessary to receive federal subsidies require conformity to the government's priorities, which now include promoting the LGBTQ agenda. At Marquette, a Title IX training program required for all employees includes warnings that the wrong kind of talk about sexual morality—meaning talk based on traditional moral judgments—should be avoided in the workplace if one does not want to face charges of harassment or discrimination. Thus the paradox: We are repeatedly warned against talking about sex, even though the rule-makers seem to talk of little else.

Resistance to this new regime seems futile—and likely to get you into trouble. Even tenured faculty members hesitate, worried about official repercussions, formal or informal. The recent and well-publicized case of political science professor John McAdams illustrates the dangers. He was accused of creating a hostile environment for graduate students, and Marquette is presently attempting to remove his tenure and dismiss him from his post. I offer no judgment on the merits

of this case. But it is important to note the subject under discussion when the events occurred that led to the accusation against him: the moral status of gay marriage.

Why has it come to this? To some extent, it's just peer pressure. Universities like Marquette and the people who lead them are a bit like some of the young women I see on campus each day, dressed almost exactly alike, seemingly afraid, more than anything, to look different from one another. How refreshing it would be for a university like mine to eschew the look-alike imperative of today's "diversity" culture and embrace instead the authentic diversity intrinsic to its Catholic identity. But in a time of declining student enrollments, the low-risk answer is to wear what the other kids are wearing and to avoid actions that might reduce us in the eyes of our "peer" (Fordham) or "aspirational" (Boston College) institutions. Sex and gender, diversity and inclusion: Everyone is wearing them today.

There's a deeper, more troubling explanation as well. For the last two generations, American Catholic theology departments have been at the forefront of a campaign of dissent against Catholic sexual morality. This campaign has often been led by Jesuits and Jesuit universities. Unlike attempts to attract more minority students, or programs to empower students from disadvantaged backgrounds—efforts in full accord with Catholic social teaching—this campaign of dissent has sometimes been underhanded, even dishonest. It has also been ruthless, working hard to suppress and punish any who speak up for the Church's teaching. The way Marquette has adopted and promoted the mishmash of LGBTQ ideology over the last few years is consistent with that tradition of dissent.

Given these realities, those who want to teach in fidelity to the Church should be prepared for a long struggle. But we must keep the faith. For when the costs of capitulation to gender ideologies and a sexual morality that ignores natural law become clear, our Catholic university leaders may at last turn to us in search of something sane and sound. We need to be ready for that moment. We owe it to our future students.

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