Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective

Catholics, the “Theory of Gender,” and the Turn to the Human in France: A New Dreyfus Affair?

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FROM GAY MARRIAGE TO THE “THEORY OF GENDER”

One of the most striking features of the protests against gay marriage that escalated in France throughout the fall of 2012 and the spring of 2013 is how quickly the organizers stopped talking about gay marriage. The massive street demonstrations that surprised many inside and outside of France claimed, at first, to be reacting against a bill put forth in November 2012 by Christiane Taubira, the minister of justice of the recently elected government of François Hollande. The law that would eventually be known as mariage pour tous or “Marriage for All” was designed to comply with one of Hollande’s campaign promises to open marriage and adoption to same-sex couples—a seemingly uncontroversial proposition that in May 2012 was backed by two-thirds of the French population. Rather than presenting the bill as providing for “gay marriage,” Hollande’s government cleverly embraced the rhetoric of republican universalism by portraying it as one that would allow “marriage for all”—as a new law that would fight discrimination and finally make the institution of marriage truly universal and truly republican.1

A few days after Taubira’s announcement, an organization by the name of the “Manif pour tous” (“Demonstration for All,” a title that also clearly played with

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1 On the rhetoric of universalism in French political culture, see Joan Wallach Scott, Parité! Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism (Chicago, 2005); and Pierre Rosanvallon, Le modèle politique français: La société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours (Paris, 2004).

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the rhetoric of universalism) called for protests against the law in all major French cities. As the founding manifesto explained, this “marriage for all” was actually a “gay marriage imposed on all” that would “erase sexual differentiation and complementarity from the law and jeopardize the foundation of human identity: sexual difference and the resulting structure of parentage [filiation].” This law, it continued, “paves the way for a new, ‘social’ parentage unrelated to human reality and creates a framework for a new anthropological order founded not on sex but on gender, that is, sexual preference.” Although the government was adamant that its law would not pertain to medically assisted procreation or to surrogacy, many of the arguments mobilized by the law’s opponents focused on reproduction and the threat of this “new social parentage” supposedly anchored in a “theory of gender.” Both PMA (procréation médicalement assistée/medically assisted procreation) and GPA (gestation pour autrui/surrogacy), the government insisted, would remain regulated by the 1994 “bioethics laws” that had banned surrogacy and restricted assisted reproductive technologies to cohabiting or married heterosexual couples. Nonetheless, the specter of unregulated reproductive technologies featured prominently in the slogans and the posters of the protesters as the next logical step from gay marriage.

As the street marches intensified and the parliamentary debates around the law grew increasingly acrimonious, the leaders of the anti-gay-marriage movement fought over the message and the strategies that the protests should embrace. In November 2012, Civitas, a self-described traditionalist Catholic lobby advocating the rechristianization of France and Europe, judged the Manif pour tous too soft and called for its own protest against “homomadness [homopholie].” The protests staged by Civitas attracted other extreme-right organizations, from royalist groups such as the Action française and the Alliance royaliste and Christian fundamentalist organizations such as the Renaissance catholique to neofascist associations such as the Jeunesses identitaires, the Renouveau français, and the GUD (Groupe union défense) that preached revolutionary nationalism and the “third way.” Eventually, many of these groups gathered under one umbrella organization that called itself the Printemps français, or French Spring. Claiming Gandhi, Solidarność, Martin Luther King, and Antigone as their symbols, the Printemps français issued a manifesto in which same-sex marriage was never mentioned. Instead, it advocated an “ideological fight against the denatured society” that the Hollande government was trying to install through the Taubira Law.

3 For why heterosexuality was central to the 1994 bioethics laws, see Daniel Borillo, Bioéthique (Paris, 2011); Marcela Iacub, Le crime était presque sexuel et autres essais de casuistique juridique (Paris, 2002); and Bruno Perreau, The Politics of Adoption: Gender and the Making of French Citizenship (Cambridge, MA, 2014).
4 http://www.civitas-institut.com/content/view/16/62/.
More specifically, the Printemps français manifesto rested on three pillars: the protection of the rights of the weakest, a battle for a more humane society, and the promotion of a lasting humanism. By the “rights of the weakest,” the group referred to children’s “inalienable right to have a mother and a father.” A “more humane society” implied the restoration of a “long-lasting link between man and society.” Finally, a “lasting humanism” would prevent man from being reduced to a “simple globalized and uprooted consumer-producer”: “We will no longer be subjected to the diktat of market ideology and we refuse a society in which banks function as cathedrals. We want to place man at the heart of the political project. We are the spring of the restoration of authentic liberties! We are the spring of lasting humanism [humanisme durable]!”

Gender, filiation, and humanism were also recurring terms in the public statements of Béatrice Bourges, one of the Printemps français’s principal leaders. Bourges, a fifty-two-year-old businesswoman and mother of two, traced her political awakening to an “intuition” she had in 2008 that the “theory of gender—according to which sexual identity can be constructed or even chosen—would ruin civilization.” To illustrate how this theory had penetrated society, Bourges referred to an experimental day care center in the suburbs of Paris in which boys and girls were allowed to play with cars and dolls interchangeably—a project dear to the minister of women’s rights, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem. In a radio interview in April 2013, Bourges warned that the Taubira Law would constitute “an anthropological rupture for all of society.” The mission of the Printemps français, she continued, was to fight against “ultra-individualistic hedonism and the idolatry of stock markets.” Refusing to position herself or her movement on either left or right, Bourges claimed instead that her struggle was for a universal humanism: “The French Spring is unwilling to accept the populist cliché that pits left and right against each other. Rather, it clings to the moral requirements of a universalist humanism that no dignified political current can spare. It does not claim to be beyond parties; rather, it lies at their bedrock. It defends the basis of democratic life, the foundations of life-in-common, the freedoms without which society becomes unlivable.” This was, Bourges concluded, an “ecological” struggle, one focused on “reconciling man with his natural habitat.”

5 http://www.printempsfrancais.fr/467/manifeste/.


Bourges was not alone in appealing to humanism, human ecology, and anthropology to counter the “theory of gender.” The references to a theory, an ideology, or a doctrine of gender underlying gay marriage in fact multiplied after the Loi Taubira came to a vote on April 23, 2013. Despite the fact that the law passed with a comfortable majority and that French mayors began to celebrate the first same-sex marriages in May of that year, many of the leaders of the Manif pour tous and the Printemps français remained active in the press, in conferences, and especially in the social networks of what has come to be known as the “cathosphère.” On the one hand, the “theory of gender” was presented as the origin of gay marriage, as its ideological justification. As Béatrice Bourges put it in a book that she coauthored with Aude Mirkovic, a professor of private law, and with Elizabeth Montfort, a former deputy to the European Parliament, it was impossible to understand how the idea of gay marriage had “imposed itself on Western societies” without explaining how the “theory of gender” had developed in the last twenty years, “first in intellectual milieus, then, more perniciously, within the media and politics, until it finally entered the world of universities and education.” With a front cover picture of a child crushed under falling dominos, the authors established a straight causal line from the theory of gender to gay marriage to medically assisted procreation and surrogacy. On the other hand, the “theory of gender” was described as the obvious outcome of gay marriage, one that would ultimately lead to the destruction of man and society. As one of the banners of the Manif pour tous put it, “Marriage for all = theory of gender for all.” This notion was echoed in the declarations of Bernard Debré, an elected representative from the UMP (Union pour un mouvement populaire) and one of the principal opponents to the Taubira Law, who described the “theory of gender” as “even more dangerous than same-sex marriage and adoption . . . because it ‘killed’ nature.” Calling it “a deviation, a madness, and even a crime,” Debré urged his electors to return to the streets after the law was passed to “refuse, protest, and tell the truth.”

8 For a study of how the notion of gender circulated in Catholic social media and blogs, see Josselin Tricou, “Diffusion de la dénonciation de ‘l’idéologie du genre’ et consécration de nouvelles ‘authorités religieuses’: Les blogueurs de la ‘cathosphère’ française; L’exemple de Koztoujours.” Presentation at the “Habemus Gender!” Conference at the Université Libre de Bruxelles on May 16, 2014.


10 See this image at http://cafaitgenre.org/2012/12/14/quot-le-politique-tente-de-controler-la-recherche/.

11 Bernard Debré, cited in “La théorie du genre, nouveau cheval de bataille de la Manif pour tous,” Huffington Post, June 5, 2013 (http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2013/06/05/la-theorie-du-genre-nouveau-cheval-bataille-manif-pour-tous_n_3388832.html). For De-
lowed the law’s passage, gender featured prominently in official and unofficial posters and in the banners of the marches, which claimed “Alterity is reality” (“L’altérité c’est la réalité”), “We want sex, not gender” (“On veut du sexe pas du genre”), “No to the theory of gender” (fig. 1), “No to gender, no to the child experiment” (fig. 2), and “Don’t touch our gender stereotypes!” (fig. 3).

In February 2013, the Union nationale inter-universitaire (UNI), a right-wing student association originally formed after May 1968 to reestablish authority within the university, founded the Observatory for the Theory of Gender (Observatoire de la théorie du genre). As its leaders explained on their website, their goal was to “offer French citizens the information and conceptual tools necessary to fight against the theory of gender.” “For a long time confined to the other side of the Atlantic,” the theory of gender was now quickly spreading throughout French society in various manifestations: “neutral day cares, the fight against gender stereotypes, the development of sexual education starting in kindergarten, the banalization of sex changes,” and same-sex marriage. “Founded on the denial of biological reality in order to impose the idea that the ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’

bré’s blog post, see http://www.bernarddebre.fr/actualites/voici_maintenant_le_retour_de_la_thorie_du_genre.
gender depended on culture or on power relations and not on any biological or anatomical reality,” the theory of gender constituted a true cohesive ideology that sought to “question the foundations of our ‘hetero-centered’ societies.”

The argument linking gender, gay marriage, and reproduction was articulated particularly forcefully during a rally of the Manif pour tous in March 2013 by Patrice André, a magistrate who had previously written a polemic against the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon, one of the treaties consolidating the European Union. André’s speech was rapidly taken up by Catholic and right-wing websites as a sort of manifesto against this aggressive and infectious gender theory. Warning his audience that they were living in a truly “historical moment of great gravity,” André contended that gay marriage was only the first step of a much more pernicious plan: “the will to abolish sexual difference” and to “impose on France, Europe, and the world a theory that is called gender and whose goal is the total subversion of the society in which we live.” Mobilizing clichés reminiscent of interwar corporatist and fascist rhetoric, André accused a “minority of LGBT activists” who had infiltrated the government and who were financed by “big international banks” and supported by the media of manipulating public opinion: “If gay marriage passes, the state will soon stop helping women who may actually

want to give birth to their children. It will tell them to stop bowing down to social determinisms and to gender clichés and it will point them instead to surrogacy and to medically assisted procreation clinics supported and financed by the state.” According to André, the theory of gender was France’s “new Dreyfus Affair.”

13 Delphine Roucaute, “Comment les détracteurs de la théorie du ‘genre’ se mobilisent,” Le Monde, May 25, 2013 (http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2013/05/25/comment-les-detacteurs-de-la-theorie-du-genre-se-mobilisent_3180069_3224.html). For the video of Patrice André’s speech, see http://youtu.be/bQg-8bsPVHY.
My goal in this essay is to understand the triangulation of these three terms—the theory of gender, gay marriage, and the human (the concept underlying humanism, anthropology, and human ecology)—through the lens of these recent debates in France. What does “the theory of gender” designate in these arguments, and how did it come to operate tautologically as both the origin and the outcome of gay marriage? Why have anti-gay-marriage activists turned to humanism (as opposed to the Bible or to canon law, for example) as a way to counter this theory of gender? The hypothesis I wish to develop here is that “the theory of gender” is a discursive strategy devised by the Vatican and taken up by numerous Catholic activists and intellectuals to counter the rhetoric of equal rights for women, gays, and lesbians. While there is, of course, a rich and wide array of works in the humanities and the social sciences that rely on the concept of gender and that fall under the rubric of “gender studies,” there is no theory or ideology of gender per se. It is in opposition not only to women’s rights (gender) and to gay and lesbian rights (marriage) but also to the logical connection that supposedly binds them that anti-gay-marriage activists have proposed the revival of “the human”: a universal and transcendental humanism premised on sexual complementarity and theorized most explicitly by Pope John Paul II.

In many ways, the story I map here is specific to France. The reaction to the Loi Taubira and the panic concerning the spread of the “theory of gender” must


15 To be clear, my aim here is not to suggest that there is a universal and unified Catholic position on these complex questions of gender and sexuality. Within the French context, various self-described progressive Catholics have repudiated the tactics and the message of the Manif pour tous and the Printemps français in editorials and other media outlets. Similarly, several theologians have urged a more open dialogue with gender studies. These were, however, a minority. On this question, see Anthony Favier, “Les catholiques et le genre: Une approche historique,” La vie des idées, March 25, 2014 (http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Les-catholiques-et-le-genre.html); and Eric Fassin and Véronique Mar Gron, Homme, Femme, quelle différence? (Paris, 2011).

16 As many commentators have pointed out, the choice of the term “theory” is meant to underline the radical, combative, and ideological purpose that these activists attribute to the study of gender. See Bruno Perreau, “Théorie du genre”, “études sur le genre”: Quelles différences?” Le Monde, propos recueillis par Mattea Battaglia, April 22, 2013; and Anne Revillard, Laure Bereni, and Sébastien Chauvin, “La théorie du genre: Réponse au ministre Vincent Peillon,” Libération, Rebonds, June 11, 2013, 24.
be understood within the French social, political, and cultural context. After all, same-sex unions and alternative forms of kinship had already generated much controversy during the 1990s before the voting of the Civil Pact of Solidarity (PACS) that legalized domestic partnerships. Furthermore, France had already witnessed a “theory of gender affair” in 2011 around government-issued high school biology textbooks. In a chapter entitled “Becoming Man or Woman,” these textbooks established a distinction between “sexual identity,” which they called public, and “sexual orientation,” which they designated as private. Catholic activists denounced the introduction of the “doctrine of gender” in the schools and circulated a petition that was eventually signed by 80 deputies and 114 senators to remove these textbooks from circulation.18

The idea that public education was promoting a “theory of gender” seemed particularly alarming given the historic function of schools—free, compulsory, and secular—as privileged institutions for integrating citizens into the French nation. Many feared that schools could become incubators of gender deviance and homosexuality just as others, a few years earlier, had feared that schools would breed radical Islam unless the hijab and other “conspicuous” religious signs were banned.19 During the 2013–14 protests against gay marriage, many banners and posters, including those of the Manif pour tous, stressed the importance of halting the spread of the theory of gender in schools (figs. 4–6).20


20 An important subtext to these discussions of gender and schools is the possibility of a “transmission of homosexuality” bound up with numerous fantasies and anxieties around the “queer child” that scholars such as Kathryn Bond Stockton (The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century [Durham, NC, 2009]) and Lee Edelman (No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive [Durham, NC, 2004]) have explored. One of the banners, for example, calling for an end to the “theory of gender and its cinema,” focused on the 2011 movie Tomboy, which chronicles the story of a ten-year-old girl passing as a boy. In 2012, the film was selected to be shown in several schools as part of the program École et cinéma, with the support of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education, inspiring various parents to circulate a petition asking that this film not be included (https://www.facebook.com/LaManifPourTous/photos/pb.513639495332869.-2207520000.1431714514.778689922161157/?type=3&theater).
the political activist and intellectual Farida Belghoul urged parents to remove their children from schools one day each month to protest the “theory of gender” that was guiding a governmental initiative designed to fight gender stereotypes, the “ABCD de l’Egalité.”

Influenced by e-mails, tweets, and text messages, many parents complied, fearing that their children would be taught homosexual-

Fig. 4.—Poster from the Manif pour tous website for the February 2, 2014, protest: “Theory of Gender in Schools: Stop.” © La Manif pour tous. A color version of this figure is available online.

ity, transgenderism, and masturbation. Instead of denying the existence of a “theory of gender,” the Minister of Education Vincent Peillon issued a public statement wishing to “solemnly reassure all the parents of France. . . . What we are doing is not the theory of gender—I reject this—it is the promotion of the values of the Republic of equality between men and women.”

If, in these various ways, the connection between gender and gay marriage is historically and theoretically particular to France, it is also inscribed in a larger international context. Indeed, the debates about gender and gay marriage belong to a global narrative that brings to light a series of intellectual, sociological, and financial networks connecting religious thinkers and activists throughout the world. The Manif pour tous, for example, has branches in many countries, and “the theory of gender” has been at the forefront of important conservative demonstrations in Italy, Poland, Spain, and Belgium. More generally, however, the Vatican’s vigilance on gender must be analyzed in the context of an increasingly globalized Christian Right mobilized, as I will return to, by two conferences coordinated by the United Nations: the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in September 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. As Doris Buss and Didi Herman have persuasively argued, the Vatican accused these two conferences of pro-

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moting a “gender agenda” seeking to undermine motherhood and the “natural family.”

Finally, the references to gender in Catholic literature are both a recent phenomenon and a long-term development. On the one hand, these international conferences, the normalization of feminism, and the spread of gay marriage throughout the Western world since the 1990s have accelerated the Vatican’s interest in questions of gender. Furthermore, it is not negligible that the Vatican’s engagement with gender and gay marriage coincides with various scandals and debates within the Catholic Church around pedophilia, homosexuality, and celibacy within the priesthood and around the ordination of women. On the other hand, the references to humanism, anthropology, and natural law in the domain of sexuality must also be understood within the longer history of Catholicism, especially after Vatican II.

One more methodological caveat. As a series of articles by investigative journalists have signaled, most of the organizations gathered under the banner of the Manif pour tous were either officially affiliated with the Catholic Church or composed of activists who had previously worked in Catholic networks. These pieces have highlighted the many interconnections with the Opus Dei, with anti-abortion organizations, with familialist associations, and with evangelical groups. The Church, in other words, provided much of the financial support, the associational infrastructure, and even the actual bodies for the protest (by organizing bus transportation from the provinces, setting up day care for the children of the protestors, etc.). This economic and sociological map is crucial for understanding how the triangulation of gender, gay marriage, and humanism came to be. In this article, however, I focus primarily on the intellectual confluences that tied the protestors to the Catholic Church. Thus, in the first part, I trace the French genealogy of the “theory of gender” as it has been phantasmatically reconstructed by these activists through a close reading of various anti-gender treatises published in the last couple of years. In the second part, I turn to the Vatican and the thought of John Paul II more specifically.


The Theory of Gender: The French Version

Many of the books that have come out in France in recent years attacking the “theory of gender” share a number of assumptions about its origins, its history, and its effects. This theory is presented as the contribution of specific thinkers but also as the product of larger philosophical currents. Most of these authors locate the genesis of gender as a concept simultaneously in very specific events (French and international) and in long-term historical developments. Interestingly, their books appeal to three distinct and not necessarily compatible definitions of gender that in their arguments become undifferentiated or slip into one another. The first is the understanding of gender as the sociocultural overlay of sex. Gender in this model would be socially constructed, as opposed to sex, which would be biologically grounded. The second is the psychiatric definition of gender as developed notably by John Money and Robert Stoller. Finally, the third is one in which gender and sex function interchangeably, as in the fields of law and public policy, where sex discrimination and gender discrimination are essentially synonymous.

In the genealogy of the first definition of gender (gender as social construction), one of the names that almost inevitably recurs is that of Judith Butler in connection with her 1990 book Gender Trouble, which appeared in French in 2005 as Trouble dans le genre. As Eric Fassin suggests in his preface to the French edition, the fact that Gender Trouble remained untranslated for fifteen years is both significant and paradoxical given Butler’s engagement with French theory and French feminism throughout her work. Indeed, the concept of gender appeared fundamentally untranslatable for many years in much of the French academic and political world for complicated reasons that had to do with the republican aversion to particularisms, with anti-Americanism, and with a histor-

26 In the American context, Ruth Bader Ginsburg has recounted how she began using the term “gender” instead of “sex” at the suggestion of her secretary at Columbia Law School, who in typing her briefs exclaimed: “I’ve been typing this word sex, sex, sex, and let me tell you, the audience that you are addressing—the men that you are addressing . . . the first association of that word is not what you’re talking about. So I suggest that you use a grammar book term; use the word ‘gender.’ It will ward off distracting associations.” “The Supreme Court: Excerpts from Senate Hearing on the Ginsburg Nomination,” New York Times, July 22, 1993. I am grateful to Mary Anne Case for pointing out how central Ginsburg was (especially through her work at the ACLU) for popularizing the term “gender” in US law.

...ical investment in presenting the relationship between French men and women as a *doux commerce*.

Yet, as Fassin argues, when several crucial questions around sexuality (same-sex unions, sexual violence, nontraditional families) came to the political forefront during the 1990s and 2000s, gender suddenly appeared necessary to understand the French sexual present (“actualité sexuelle”).

In many of the arguments against the “theory of gender,” Butler appears as a representative of two philosophical traditions: deconstruction and radical feminism. While certain authors trace deconstruction to the critical philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche, others privilege what they see as their “French versions” in the works of Derrida and Foucault. In either case, these thinkers share the same goal of emancipating subjects from all norms and granting them unlimited freedom. Thus, according to Elizabeth Montfort, the fact that Butler relies so heavily on Nietzsche is revealing because both seek to “construct a new humanity, liberated from all norms and from all references to a preexisting order. A society in which every individual in his will-to-power is a new god because he can define himself in a denial of reality.”

For the philosopher Thibaud Collin, Butler draws on Foucault’s notion of subjectification: subjects are constituted (subjectivation) in their subjection to power (assujettissement) through discourses and norms, including norms of education and sexual difference. As we saw with the protest banners and posters, education features prominently in these books as the terrain in which the ideological battle around gender takes place. As one banner summarized it: “Teacher, what is gender? Wait until you no longer know who you are.”

Apart from deconstruction, Butler’s work is signaled as the culmination of radical feminism, a tradition that begins with Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that “one is not born a woman, one becomes one” and that gets progressively politicized as it crosses the Atlantic. Within this category, the names that most often come up are those of Monique Wittig, Gayle Rubin, Adrienne Rich, and Shulamith Firestone. According to the theologian Jutta Burggraf, one of the authors of *Gender: La controverse*, these radical feminists do not simply wish to criticize sexism but rather to “deconstruct society, beginning with the family and

30 Montfort, *Le genre démasqué*, 82.
32 See the banner at https://www.flickr.com/photos/98235597@N03/9687378170/ from an anti-gender demonstration in Paris on June 3, 2013.
the education of the children." For Bishop Oscar Alzamora Revoredo, in the same collection, this kind of “gender feminism” draws on Marxism and especially on Engels’s 1884 critique of the family, but it takes Marxism one step further as it encourages not only the destruction of classes but also the destruction of sexual difference.

In these analyses of “gender feminism,” the rhetoric of national belonging also surfaces in interesting ways. Certain terms, most notably “gender” (sometimes parodied as djendeur), but also “women’s studies,” “queer,” and “privacy,” remain untranslated as if to suggest that they are fundamentally alien to French society but also, perhaps, to mask their French heritage. In Thibaud Collin’s reconstruction of the history of gender, Monique Wittig, famous for her declaration that “lesbians are not women,” has her name exoticized twice as “Monica Wittig,” and her texts are quoted from the English translation rather than the French original. Similarly, Jacques Arènes, a psychoanalyst and professor of ethics at the Université Catholique de Lille, raises the specter of communauteurisme (with all its implications of social war, fragmentation, and chaos) as he invokes the proximity of “gender feminists” to “scholars of race and neocolonialism, which in the United States are called postcolonial and race studies” (in English).

In many of the anti-gender texts and protests in France, the attacks on Judith Butler have also taken on a personal character, with Butler coming to incarnate not only the “theory of gender” but also homosexuality, gay parenting, and Jewishness. The link between gender and gay parenting had already been suggested by the philosopher Sylviane Agacinski in a 1999 article published in *Le Monde* and entitled “Against the Erasure of the Sexes,” which argued against same-sex parenting at the height of the debates around the PACS. In October 2001, members of the Renouveau français, a neofascist association fighting for the promotion of a “nationalist, social, and Christian state” that regularly marched with the Printemps français during the anti-gay-marriage protests, interrupted a ceremony awarding Judith Butler an honoris causa doctorate at the University of

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34 Conseil Pontifical pour la Famille, *Gender*, 30.
Bordeaux. Dressed in drag, they heckled Butler during her speech and held up signs such as “I want a mustache!” “I want to become a dolphin, can I?” and “Judith, don’t touch my...” Also in reaction to the Bordeaux doctorate, Claude Timmerman, a self-described agronomist, journalist, and contributor to the journal *La France courtoise*, attacked Butler and the theory of gender in a video that circulated widely on Catholic and right-wing websites. “The theory of gender,” Timmerman argued, “is an ethnic theory that seeks to legitimate homosexuality. It is the fruit of Jewish American lesbians” such as Judith Butler and Anne Fausto-Sterling.

A second definition of gender circulating in these debates is one derived from psychiatry, psychology, and psychoanalysis. Many of the recent books against gender refer to John Money, the Johns Hopkins psychologist who, during the 1950s, famously distinguished sex and gender in his treatment of intersex children. Similarly, they mention Robert Stoller, a psychiatrist at the University of California, Los Angeles, who also emphasized the difference between sex and gender in his work with transsexuals. Despite the fact that both scientists contributed to the theorization of gender, they remained, according to Thibaud Collin, committed to the distinction between the normal and the pathological. It is thus only with feminism and critical theory that gender became a tool to challenge norms. In its most violent version, it gave rise to queer theory, also left untranslated and described as “the radical ideology that seeks to overcome the distinction sex-gender and to affirm the conventional nature of sexual difference, in an attempt to subvert sexual behaviors and identities.” As Jacques Arènes puts it, the point of “the queer discourse is to attack the ‘constraints’ of normality. . . . As a minority, the queer movement does not seek to ‘assimilate’ to the majority culture but rather to attack its center.”

While many of these thinkers converge in locating the birth of gender at the intersection of deconstruction, feminism, and psychiatry, many also insist on the idea that a particular historical context was necessary for the propagation of

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39 See http://rf-bordeaux.blogspot.com/2011/10/decidemment-judith-butler-nest-pas-de.html#. For the video of the intervention, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcrxSvbLPM.


42 Boyancé et al., L’éducation à l’âge du gender, 18.

43 Ibid., 28–29.

the concept. Here again, explanations vary from the long term to specific events, but most critics agree that gender emerged after the radical shift of the 1960s. For some, such as the priest, psychoanalyst, and consultant to the Pontifical Council on the Family Tony Anatrella, the theory of gender succeeded Marxism. Like Marxism, it understood social relations through the lens of the oppressor/oppressed paradigm but was “more oppressive and more pernicious because it foregrounded the question of liberation against unjust constraints and the recognition of freedom and equality of all before the law.” This chronology rehashes the popular thesis that the 1960s, and May ’68 in particular, gave way to an era of individualism, liberalism (or neoliberalism, depending on the sources), narcissism, hedonism, and relativism, at the expense of social unity and cohesion. Thus, these critics contend, this new era is constantly threatened by the specter of a totalitarianism that no longer takes the form of its twentieth-century predecessors, Marxism and fascism, but emerges, rather, as droits-de-l’homme, “too many rights”—the “excessive democracy” that Tocqueville so aptly described and decried.

It is in the discussions of law and policy that we see most clearly the third definition of gender in which it operates as synonymous with sex. The legislation preventing gender discrimination constitutes for many of these authors a good example of this kind of democratic totalitarianism and excessive individualism, which, in law, take the form of legal positivism—according to which the sole function of the law is to satisfy individual demands. Thus, for Bourges, Mirkovic, and Montfort, gender was able to impose itself in the political world because of the current “positivist conception of human rights” that only takes into account privacy and “particularisms of individuals.” In this context, law is reduced to the expression of the majority and norms can only reflect consensus. This vision of a slippery slope of democracy also informs Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo’s introduction to the Vatican’s 2003 Lexicon on Ambiguous and Colloquial Terms about Family Life and Ethical Questions. Legal positivism has paved the way for gender laws and for gay marriage in the sense that in today’s society, laws are

45 Conseil Pontifical pour la Famille, Gender, 28; Montfort, Le genre démasqué, 30.
47 For a historiographical account and critique of this thesis, see Julian Bourg, From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought (Montreal, 2007).
48 Xavier Lacroix, La confusion des genres réponses à certaines demandes homosexuelles sur le mariage et l’adoption (Paris, 2005), 12; Conseil Pontifical pour la Famille, Gender, 7.
49 Bourges, Mirkovic, and Montfort, De la théorie du genre au mariage de même sexe, 8.
considered good not because they “seek the good of the human understood in
his totality” but because they conform to the will of the majority.\textsuperscript{50}

In these arguments, legal individualism is also opposed to French civil law,
with the Napoleonic Code presented as a legal text centered around the hetero-
sexual family and committed to a form of universal and transhistorical normativ-
ity. Thus, as Cardinal Philippe Barbarin declared, those who advocate gay mar-
rriage preach an “absolute democracy,” whereas French civil law has always
prioritized social stability and the general interest.\textsuperscript{51} Or, in the words of the
Council on Family and Society: “marriage has always had the social function of
framing the transmission of life by articulating, in the personal and patrimonial
domains, the duties and rights of spouses, between themselves and toward the
children to come. The individualist conception of marriage . . . is not grounded in
our legal texts.”\textsuperscript{52}

As I previously suggested, many of these sources highlight the foundational
role of two United Nations conferences (the International Conference on Popu-
lation and Development held in Cairo in September 1994 and the Fourth World
Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995) in institutionalizing
gender in the political and legal arenas. In the words of Tony Anatrella, the Vati-
can’s concern with the “sophism” of the theory of gender was accentuated after
the Beijing conference, which “imposed on all member countries the concepts of
the theory of gender under the guise of women’s liberation and the emancipation
of prejudices in the sexual domain.”\textsuperscript{53} Such narratives generally stress the co-
vert, pernicious, and often imperialist strategies that the promoters of the gender
agenda used, to the surprise and dismay of the Catholic and third-world dele-
gates.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, according to Oscar Alzamora Revoredo, the conference’s directive
committee first proposed to define gender as “the relations between men and
women based on socially defined roles that are assigned to one sex or another.”
Despite the consternation of many of the delegates (Catholic, Latin American,
and African), several speakers fought to impose this notion of gender, in partic-

\textsuperscript{50} Église Catholique Pontificium Consilium Pro Familia, \textit{Lexique des termes ambigus et controversés}, 7.


\textsuperscript{52} http://www.eglise.catholique.fr/getFile.php?ID=20797.

\textsuperscript{53} Conseil Pontifical pour la Famille, \textit{Gender}, 20.

\textsuperscript{54} See, in this context, the account of Mary Ann Glendon, the head of the Delegation of the Holy See, who compared the conference to the leaning tower of Pisa, “admirable from some angles, but unbalanced, and resting on a shaky foundation.” In Mary Ann Glendon, “What Happened at Beijing,” \textit{First Things} (January 1996). For a full report of the pro-
ular the United States delegate Bella Abzug. As Abzug declared, according to Revoredo: “The intention of several member states to erase the term gender from the Platform for Action and to replace it by sex is an insulting and degrading attempt to roll back gains that women have made, to intimidate us and to prevent future progress.” Revoredo concludes that Abzug’s speech led to the distribution of pamphlets with key texts used by “gender feminists teaching in colleges and universities of great reputation in the United States.”

In this passage, we can see how the slippage occurs between gender as a legal category and gender as the conceptual tool theorized in women’s studies departments.

Elizabeth Montfort, who served as a representative to the European Parliament, also describes in her book the insidious process through which the “theory of gender” slowly infiltrated the agendas of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament—organizations that, as she explains, exercise a real power on populations but one that is increasingly “disincarnated and removed from their realities.” As examples of policies guided by the “theory of gender,” Montfort mentions the Beijing Platform declaration that maternity constitutes an “obstacle in the professional career of women and a threat to the equality between men and women” and its subsequent promotion of contraception and abortion. Similarly, she argues, gender informed the European Union policies of the year 2000 that recognized sexual orientation as a basis for discrimination and inequality. According to Montfort, the shift not only in policy but also in the meaning of gender came about under the influence of an international “gay lobby” that rejected the notion of “sex” in favor of gender and that advocated “gender mainstreaming.”

While intergovernmental associations play a key role in the Catholic critique of gender, French sources also point to specific French events that contributed to the imposition of gender in the political realm. Many refer, for instance, to the previously mentioned scandal surrounding the high school biology textbooks in 2011. In an official report that year, the Ministry of Education suggested that students be introduced to a notion of gender (defined as socially acquired) that would be distinguished from that of sex (defined as biological). Several of the textbooks discussed gender as a norm that had been internalized for so long that it had brought about a series of stereotypes and discriminations that could be—and ought to be—challenged. The textbooks also referred to sexual orientation as another modality of “private life,” stressed the importance of contraception and family planning, and brought up intersex children as evidence for the arbitra-

55 Conseil Pontifical pour la Famille, Gender, 48–49.
56 Montfort, Le genre démasqué, 35.
57 Ibid., 36.
58 Ibid., 37.
ness of gender designations. According to Elizabeth Montfort, these textbooks provided a “technical” understanding of sexuality and reproduction, one in which the body is reduced to “its material and functional dimension, without the language of the heart present in the relationship with the other, without any mention of the gift of oneself or the love of the other. Love is not a ‘doing,’ a technique or a practice, but the reciprocal gift of bodies, hearts, and intelligences. In these books, sexual practices would result exclusively from the decision of the adolescent to live fully his or her ‘sexual freedom.’”

In this passage we begin to see the alternative notion of sexuality proposed by many of these authors, one that is anchored in Karol Wojtyla’s theological writings, to which I will return. For now, however, I would like to emphasize the connection between gender and homosexuality that underlies many of the arguments above. On the one hand, gender seems to have been imposed by a “homosexual lobby” dominant in the political circles of intergovernmental bodies such as the United Nations, in national political groups such as the Socialist Party, in the media, and in the academy.

As Anatrella writes, the gay and lesbian movement found in gender “a ‘philosophy’ with a scientific look that would justify and carry their demands to the heart of society.” On the other hand, gay marriage and the legal recognition of same-sex parenting appear as the necessary result of this theory of gender. Gender, according to these arguments, brings about a society of disenchantment, of free-floating individuals where all norms are relative, a society in “which the subject decides [because] the postmodern individual must be able to create himself. It is his most fundamental right: ‘the right to be himself.’” Legal demands for same-sex couples consequently emerge as symptoms of this postmodern individualism that will ultimately undo society at its core.

Thus, for these critics mobilized by the debates around gay marriage, the attack on gender appears to channel various—not necessarily compatible or coherent—anxieties about the social, the individual, language, and power. The main concern is perhaps that of omnipotence and unbounded individual autonomy: a framework in which “man’s only reference is his self, his will, and his reason,” a disembodied will where all norms are subject to power struggles and language

59 Ibid., 95–110; Bourges, Mirkovic, and Montfort, De la théorie du genre au mariage de même sexe, 3.
60 Montfort, Le genre démasqué, 108.
61 Lelièvre, La famille face au déf du gender, 12. In the preface to this book, Mgr. Jacques Suaudeau adds the term “aisé” or “well-off” to this description of a gay/gender community.
62 Conseil Pontifical pour la Famille, Gender, 5.
63 Ibid., 128.
64 Montfort, Le genre démasqué homme ou femme? 61.
65 Bourges, Mirkovic, and Montfort, De la théorie du genre au mariage de même sexe, 18.
games, and a “semantic confusion” through which terms cease to signify what they have always meant. According to Arènes, this model will bring about an unbridled social competition, a “gigantic market of sexual self-foundation [auto-fondation], in which the most intelligent, the most clever, or the best seducers will be winners. Narcissistic competition is the agenda of sexuality and of sexual politics.”

In more general terms, gender is depicted as a vehicle for social and psychic dissolution because it fails to articulate the material and the abstract. Thus, Anatrella accuses gender of being an “idealist and disembodied theory,” while Arènes condemns its vision of bodies as “virtual” and “unreal.” Yet, as we previously saw, Montfort accuses gender of reducing the body to its “material and functional dimension.” In the words of Bourges, Mirkovic, and Montfort, gender promotes a “culture of dissociation: between identity and behavior, between will and corporeal reality, between sexuality and procreation, between union and filiation, between kinship and parenting [parenté et parentalité]” in favor of an “absolute and abstract freedom seeking to be recognized by a new law.” This ideology, they argue, constitutes an attack on the “unity of the human person.” It is to reconnect with this “unity of the human person,” with a spirituality grounded in the material, that these critics urge us to return to the anthropology of Karol Wojtyla, or John Paul II.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF JOHN PAUL II

Just as these French critiques of gender share a number of assumptions with regard to the necessary link—practical and conceptual—between gender and LGBT rights, they also often propose a similar model—once again, philosophical and political—to counter these rights. Specifically, they insist that what they seek is not a biological determinism in which masculinity and femininity would be considered simple natural attributes. Rather, they advocate a more dynamic understanding of sex and gender by proposing to revisit the “anthropological foundations of our society.” In this vision, the human and the social are inextricably linked and fundamentally anchored in sexual difference. As Elizabeth Montfort

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66 Église Catholique Pontificium Consilium Pro Familia, Lexique des termes ambigus et controversés, 8.
68 Ibid., 10, Conseil Pontifical pour la Famille, Gender, 16.
69 Montfort, Le genre démasqué, 108. The parallels with the Dreyfus Affair are again interesting here. First, the anti-Dreyfusard camp stressed the fatal consequences that the exoneration of Dreyfus as an individual (whether guilty or not) would have on law and society as whole. Second, Jews, like homosexuals, were considered too material and too abstract at once, too racialized and yet at the same time too cosmopolitan.
70 Bourges, Mirkovic, and Montfort, De la théorie du genre au mariage de même sexe, 35.
puts it: “The human person is neither an absolute individuality, as the ultra liberals would like, nor is it a simple element of a collective system, as radical Marxists would suggest. For its full realization, the human person is called to live in communities founded on the difference and complementarity of its members, of their qualities and their functions.” Montfort’s vision of the social is thus premised on exchange, on the paradigm of the gift that anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss have examined—one in which heterosexual marriage is the “elementary principle.” As Montfort writes, “marriage is par excellence the site of the relations between man and woman, because it reveals their capacity to give and to receive the gift of one another.”

In this anthropological discussion, the critics of gender sometimes refer to Genesis as the authoritative text asserting the humanness of humans (as opposed to their animality) and the foundational role of sexual difference: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). Aside from this passage, however, the Bible is rarely cited. Instead, the name that recurs—either explicitly or implicitly—is that of John Paul II. For these critics, the works of John Paul II, and more specifically his theology of the body, can provide the basis for this new anthropology, a return to the “lasting humanism” that Béatrice Bourges called for in order to counter the “theory of gender” and all of its legal, political, social, and psychic consequences.

Thus, Hubert Lelièvre describes John Paul II’s theology of the body as a “time bomb,” as “the great answer to gender and to these other questions and challenges.” Similarly, Thibaud Collin argues that “the works and the teachings of John Paul II shed the greatest light on masculinity and femininity and their complementarity to fulfill.” Citing Karol Wojtyła’s 1960 work Love and Responsibility, Collin urges us to return to a notion of the sexed body as the “sign and instrument of the gift” of which the most profound form is given through marriage: “I believe that the philosophical and theological anthropology of K. Wojtyla is the best response to the road ‘from subjectification [assujettissement] to subject formation [subjectivation]’ proposed by Judith Butler.” Wojtyla’s work offers an alternative anthropology, Collin continues, one that conceives of the subject as “free and responsible, able to give himself, to realize his life in the communion of persons and in the openness to life.”

71 Montfort, Le genre démasqué, 84.
72 Ibid., 85.
73 For two good examples of this argument, see the text of Véronique Margron in Eric Fassin and Véronique Margron, Homme, femme, quelle différence? (Paris, 2011); and Michel Viot, Les fondements bibliques de paternité et maternité, avant-propos de Mgr. Maurice de Germiny (Versailles, 2013). See also Verlinde, L’idéologie du gender, 96.
74 Lelièvre, La famille face au défi du gender, 92 (his emphasis).
75 Boyancé et al., L’éducation à l’âge du gender, 35.
76 Ibid., 36.
the *Lexicon on Ambiguous Terms* bring up Wojtyla’s philosophy of the family repeatedly as a means of countering the “ideology of the culture of death” underlying the “theory of gender.”

As several historians of religion have noted, the pontificate of John Paul II was marked by a radicalization of the Church discourse on sexual morality and a virulent critique of modernity. In contrast to the spirit of openness and *aggiornamento* (bringing up to date) triggered by the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II insisted on the importance of restoring traditional morality in the domain of sexuality, especially in terms of abortion, contraception, and homosexuality. Wojtyla was instrumental in formulating the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1968. Delivered at the height of the discourse on sexual liberation and only a few months after the student revolts in France, *Humanae Vitae* came as a shock to many Catholic believers because of its intransigent rejection of birth control and its defense of traditional marriage.

As historian Martine Sevegrand reminds us, *Humanae Vitae* also put an abrupt end to three years of intense theological debates around sexuality that followed the closing of the Second Vatican Council in 1963. These debates, which were largely carried out within the Pontifical Committee for the Study of Population, Family, and Birthrate set up by Paul VI, pitted a conservative minority invested in reaffirming the principles of the 1930 *Casti Connubii* (which had banned birth control, condemned abortion, and reaffirmed the sanctity of marriage) against a more progressive majority interested in reconciling the official doctrine of the Church with the lived realities of married couples. Eventually, after much back and forth, and after the “majority report” has been leaked to the press in 1967, Paul VI chose to side with the conservative faction. Deeply shaken by the controversy unleashed by his text, the pope never published another encyclical and remained silent on the question of marriage until his death in 1978. At the time of the debates that preceded *Humanae Vitae*, Karol Wojtyla was Cardinal of Krakow. Even though the Polish government prevented him from traveling to Rome to attend the final deliberations, he exercised a decisive influence on

Paul VI’s decision to side with the conservative minority. After his election to the papacy in 1978, Wojtyla renewed his commitment to the principles of *Humanae Vitae* as the official Church doctrine on sexuality, muffling all dissenting voices and reaffirming traditional prohibitions ranging from masturbation to homosexuality.

Many of the principles affirmed in *Humanae Vitae* were inspired by Wojtyla’s work on sexuality, which was extensive throughout the 1950s and 1960s. As a priest in Poland during the 1950s, Wojtyla founded the Srodowisko (loosely translated as group, circle, or network), a gathering of young Christians, scientists, philosophers, and theologians. The Srodowisko organized summer camps, ski trips in the winter, debates, and reflection groups, many of which revolved around the questions of marriage, family, and sexuality. Wojtyla, who took the name Wujek or uncle (because priests were banned from preaching to the youth), developed much of his theory of love and of marriage as gift during these years.

The pastoral “empirical knowledge” he had acquired led him to the publication of two texts in 1960: a play titled *The Jeweler’s Shop*, which staged three marriages and emphasized the importance of love as a conduit to happiness and to God, and a monograph titled *Love and Responsibility*. These works offer us important insights into the development of John Paul II’s “anthropology” and how it came to be imagined as an alternative to the “theory of gender.”

In general terms, we can highlight three major intellectual influences on John Paul II’s early work on sexuality. The first was the spousal poetry and theology of Saint John of the Cross that Wojtyla studied in his 1948 doctoral dissertation in theology directed by Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange at the Angelicum, one of the main centers of Thomist revival during the first half of the twentieth century. The second was German phenomenology, particularly the work of Edmund Husserl and his students Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and most importantly Max Scheler, who was the subject of Wojtyla’s habilitation thesis in 1953. Finally, Wojtyla’s youth was deeply marked by his encounter with personalism, notably through Emmanuel Mounier and Jacques Maritain.

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80 Sevegrand claims that Wojtyla was the last bishop that Paul VI consulted before the promulgation of his encyclical (Sevegrand, *La sexualité*, 54). His biographer confirms this in Bernard Lecomte, *Jean-Paul II* (Paris, 2006), 359.


84 See George Huntston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II: Origins of His Thought and Action* (New York, 1981); Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyla: The Thought of the Man*
Within this genealogy, I would simply like to highlight three overlapping themes that came to be prevalent not only in *Love and Responsibility* but also in all of Wojtyla’s later work. The first is the understanding of the subject in relation to an other. Rather than considering the subject as an isolated rational being, both phenomenology and personalism treat the subject as a person enmeshed in social relations. Second, these philosophies stress the importance of love as a model for an authentic relationship with the other—what Wojtyla calls the “personalistic norm.” For Wojtyla, love, which allows a person to give him- or herself to an other, is the opposite of utilitarianism, which in marriage takes the form of hedonism or laxity. Within this framework, to merely enjoy a person (sexually, for example) is contrary to the dignity of the person. Heterosexual love, in this sense, would provide a true ethics that would be personal and social at once.\(^5\) Third, these theories highlight the centrality of the “social question,” understood not only as a concern with the growing masses of working poor emerging from the Industrial Revolution but also, more generally, as a call to radically rethink the essence of the social, the necessary interconnection of all beings.\(^6\) In this context, the heterosexual family could function as a solution to the social question, and Catholicism could provide an alternative to both socialism and liberalism at once.\(^7\)

Between September 1979 and November 1984, Wojtyla, by now elected pope, pursued his reflection on sexuality in a series of 129 lectures delivered each

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\(^5\) For more on the role of the family in personalism, see Fernando Moreno Valencia, “Famille et personnalisme,” in *Église Catholique Pontificium Consilium Pro Familia, Lexique des termes ambigus et controversés*, 457–74. James Chappel underscores the importance of love in personalism in “Marriage as a Vocation: Catholicism, Sexuality, and Democracy, 1920–60” (unpublished manuscript, Duke University).

\(^6\) In this sense, Wojtyla was in conversation with other European Social Catholics who wrestled with the social question in different contexts and attempted to forge an alternative to both socialism and liberalism during the first half of the twentieth century. For more on Catholicism and the social question in Poland, see Mikołaj Stanisław Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in Twentieth-Century Poland; The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki* (Athens, OH, 2012); Brian Porter, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (New York, 2011). For a comparative approach on Catholicism and the social question, see James Chappel, “Slaying the Leviathan: Catholicism and the Rebirth of European Conservatism, 1920–1950” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012); and Piotr H. Kosicki, “Between Catechism and Revolution: Poland, France, and the Story of Catholicism and Socialism in Europe, 1878–1958” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2011).

Wednesday that were eventually collected as *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. These lectures took up many of the questions that had been central to Wojtyła’s early philosophy around the personalist understanding of self, marriage, and love. They were also, however, a passionate defense of *Humanae Vitae* ten years after its publication, another plea for the inseparability of procreative and conjugal acts. According to Wojtyła, much of the controversy surrounding *Humanae Vitae* could be attributed to a confusion on the part of Catholic believers between “the order of nature” and the “biological order,” a distinction that he had already emphasized in *Love and Responsibility*: “The ‘biological order,’ as a product of human intellect which abstracts its elements from a larger reality,” Wojtyła tells us, “has man for its immediate author. The claim to autonomy in one’s ethical views is a short jump from this. It is otherwise with the order of nature, which means the totality of the cosmic relationships that arise among existing entities.”

It is in opposition to this biological order and to autonomy that Wojtyła develops his theory of the body as the sign of the radical gift of self between man and woman, the “hermeneutics of the gift.” In this sense, *A Theology of the Body* can be read as the theory of embodiment supplementing Wojtyła’s theory of love. The body can never be reduced to matter because the human person is by definition embodied. Thus, Wojtyła can defend *Humanae Vitae* because “the fundamental problem the encyclical presents is the viewpoint of the authentic development of the human person; such development should be measured, as a matter of principle, by the measure of ethics and not just ‘technology.’” Against a “technological” understanding of the body reduced to an organism, John Paul II advocates “an integral vision of man” that would preserve the “meaning and dignity of man.” In this context, it is nature (grounded in heterosexuality) and not self-mastery that is the true space of freedom. We can see in the passage above why the critics of gender might turn to the theology of the body as the basis for an alternative anthropology.

Thus, I would argue that the anthropology of John Paul II has emerged as a tool to fight the “theory of gender” for three main reasons. First, it offers a notion of the self inextricably connected to the other, to the social, and to God. The body is neither pure biology nor pure social construction, neither pure abstraction nor pure materiality, but rather what provides the link between the two. Second, the primary other in this development of the person is the person of the opposite sex. Heterosexuality features prominently in the origin of society, and sexual comple-

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91 Ibid., 59:3.
mentarity in marriage serves to instantiate harmonious social relations more broadly. Finally, Wojtyła’s anthropology functions as a theory of heteronomy that can be easily opposed to the excessive autonomy and urge for self-creation that, according to these critics, drive the “theory of gender.” Far from rejecting sexuality, John Paul II made heterosexual exchange (and, consequently, the heterosexual family) the centerpiece not only of his anthropology but also of his dogma and his social philosophy. As he proclaimed in his 1981 Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, “the future of humanity passes by way of the family.”

And indeed, John Paul II’s anthropology did not remain confined to the halls of the Vatican or to theological journals. Starting in 1980, the pope asked the Synod of Bishops to ponder the question of the Christian family. This task was carried out in very concrete terms through various advisory bodies created by John Paul throughout the 1980s and 1990s: the Pontifical Council on the Family, founded on May 9, 1981 (which replaced and expanded the Committee for the Family founded by Paul VI in 1973); the Institute for the Study of Marriage and the Family, founded on May 13, 1981 (later known as the Institute John Paul II); the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, founded in January 1994; and the Pontifical Academy for Life, founded in February 1994. Gathering experts from all fields, organizing conferences and meetings, and publishing extensively, these committees “translated” the anthropology of John Paul II into specific pastoral advice and political recommendations. Furthermore, I would suggest, these advisory bodies were key in filtering the “theory of gender” to the greater public, in devising and popularizing the expression, and in promoting a return to the human as envisioned by Wojtyla.

The 2003 Lexicon on Ambiguous and Colloquial Terms about Family Life and Ethical Questions, for example, which was published by the Pontifical Council on the Family, featured a number of Francophone “experts,” all engaged in the wars around gender. Among the previously mentioned authors, we can single out Tony Anatrella. Relying on psychoanalytic language, Anatrella warned against the violent narcissism of homosexuality, the imminent risk of psychosis in same-sex parenting (given the foreclosure of the paternal signifier), and the social and psychic deregulation that would ensue if same-sex unions became legal. Anatrella was one of the most important theorizers of the necessary link between gender and homosexuality.

Xavier Lacroix was another contributor to


93 For a good presentation of these figures, see Anthony Favier, “La réception catholique des études du genre: Une approche historique (contexte francophone),” in Le genre, approches dépassionnées d’un débat (Lille, 2012).

94 Aside from the references cited above, see Tony Anatrella, La teoria del “gender” e l’origine dell’omosessualità (Milan, 2012).
the *Lexicon* who also served as an expert for the Pontifical Council on the Family. In his numerous books, he developed John Paul II’s ideas on sexual complementarity and attacked gender and homosexuality, which he designated as a less developed form of neurotic narcissism.\(^\text{95}\) Finally, we can mention Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, also a contributor to the *Lexicon*, an advisor to the Pontifical Council, and one of the leaders of the anti-gay-marriage front. In April 2013, one month before the Taubira Law passed, Vingt-Trois denounced the “society of violence” that would come about with the new law, if France continued to “refuse to recognize that people are not identical.” For the cardinal, gay marriage had to be understood within the “larger organized and activist invasion of the theory of gender in education” and the “concealment of sexual difference as a psychological reality,” a theory that would harm “social peace” in the long run.\(^\text{96}\) In opposition to the rise of gender, he advocated the revalorization of human dignity.

**Dignity versus Rights**

In May 1995, as it seemed clear from the preparatory sessions that gender would play a prominent role in the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations in Beijing, John Paul II wrote a letter to Gertrude Mongella, the secretary general of the conference, warning that “solutions to the issues and problems raised at the Conference, if they are to be honest and permanent, cannot but be based on the recognition of the inherent, inalienable dignity of women, and the importance of women’s presence and participation in all aspects of social life.” “In fact,” the pope continued, “the recognition of the dignity of every human being is the foundation and support of the concept of *universal human rights*. For believers, that dignity and the rights that stem from it are solidly grounded in the truth of the human being’s creation in the image and likeness of God.” “Equality of dignity,” however, did not imply “sameness with men”:

This would only impoverish women and all of society, by deforming or losing the unique richness and the inherent value of femininity. In the Church’s outlook, women and men have been called by the Creator to live in profound communion with one another, with reciprocal knowledge and giving of self, acting together for the common good with the complementary characteristics of that which is feminine and masculine. At the same time we must not forget that at the personal level one’s dignity is experienced not as a result of


the affirmation of rights on the juridical and international planes, but as the natural consequence of the concrete material, emotional and spiritual care received in the heart of one’s family.97

Mary Ann Glendon, a professor at the Harvard Law School and the head of the Holy See Delegation, returned to this rhetoric of rights and dignity in her closing statement. Deploiring the “exaggerated individualism” of the conference, she warned against the “colonization of the broad and rich discourse of universal rights by an impoverished, libertarian rights dialect.” If gender was symptomatic of this excessive liberalism, dignity was the better concept to translate the “distinctiveness and complementarity of women and men” that Pope John Paul had preached throughout his life.98

And indeed, in the decade that followed the Beijing conference, the Vatican foregrounded this notion of human dignity premised on sexual complementarity as the best tool with which to contend against gender. This was the explicit mission not only of the 2003 Lexicon on Ambiguous and Colloquial Terms but also of the 2004 “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World.” Written by Joseph Ratzinger, at the time Cardinal and Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the letter began with a condemnation of the “new approaches to women’s issues” that have emerged in recent years:

A first tendency is to emphasize strongly conditions of subordination in order to give rise to antagonism: women, in order to be themselves, must make themselves the adversaries of men. Faced with the abuse of power, the answer for women is to seek power. This process leads to opposition between men and women, in which the identity and role of one are emphasized to the disadvantage of the other, leading to harmful confusion regarding the human person, which has its most immediate and lethal effects in the structure of the family. A second tendency emerges in the wake of the first. In order to avoid the domination of one sex or the other, their differences tend to be denied, viewed as mere effects of historical and cultural conditioning. In this perspective, physical difference, termed sex, is minimized, while the purely cultural element, termed gender, is emphasized to the maximum and held to be primary.

These theories, according to Ratzinger, had directly inspired noxious ideologies that “call into question the family, in its natural two-parent structure of mother and


father, and make homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent, in a new model of polymorphous sexuality.”

To oppose gender, Ratzinger encouraged Catholics to return to the teachings of John Paul II and more specifically to his vision of the “active collaboration between the sexes precisely in the recognition of the difference between man and woman.” Ratzinger argued that sexual difference is not only physical but also psychological and spiritual. It is “the fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, of manifestation, of communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing and of living human love.” Only through sexual difference can we truly respect the dignity of men and women, since “their equal dignity as persons is realized as physical, psychological and ontological complementarity, giving rise to a harmonious relationship of ‘uni-duality.’”

The three statements above stage with particular clarity two competing visions of the human, of the social, and of law: on the one hand, the abstract individual of liberalism defined exclusively by his or her freedom, and on the other, the “human person” caught in a web of social relations anchored in sexual difference. Dignity and natural law (which, according to the definitions above, can only exist within the heterosexual context of the reproductive family) thus reemerge in the discourse of the Church as barriers against the historicity of positive law. Humanism, anthropology, dignity, and human ecology have thus, in the last two decades, provided the Catholic Church with a particularly effective rhetoric not simply to attack gender but also, and more importantly, to redefine the social as fundamentally heterosexual and thus to prevent certain groups of society from having access to equal rights.

The fact that the Catholic Church—and the French Catholic Church in particular—has found solace in terms and concepts that were previously strongly iden-


tified with secular republicanism is interesting in light of the many comparisons between the controversy around the “theory of gender” and the Dreyfus Affair. To be sure, commentators invoked Dreyfus—a familiar trope in French political culture—to designate the bitter, strident, and divisive turn that the discussions had taken during the spring of 2013. In this context, some commentators circulated the famous Caran d’Ache cartoon “A Family Dinner,” originally published in Le Figaro in 1898, to illustrate the deep social divisions brought about by the Marriage for All law—divisions that transcended neat political affiliations and that affected spheres as private and intimate as a family meal.101 Proponents of gay marriage compared their opponents to the anti-Dreyfusards of the nineteenth century in order to disqualify them as reactionary, antimodern, and antirepublican and to emphasize their close link with the Church.102 In the words of Pascal Cherki, the mayor of the fourteenth arrondissement in Paris, like the anti-Dreyfusards, those protesting gay marriage ultimately refused “the gueuze, the Republic and its emancipating project articulated around equality.”103 In the opposite camp, bloggers and journalists also turned to the Dreyfus Affair to attack their adversaries as fake intellectuals motivated by anticlericalism and intolerance and to accuse the socialist government of François Hollande of fostering hate and social division.104 What is clear from both cases, however, is that the references to the Dreyfus Affair served to highlight the fact that this debate around marriage and gender touched on the core definition of national belonging by exposing the limits of who could and who could not be recognized and integrated into the social body.


103 Pascal Cherki, “Nous avons conforté l’idéal républicain,” April 23, 2013 (http://www.pascal-cherki.fr/mariage-pour-tous-nous-avons-conforte-ideal-republicain/). The gueuze is a derogatory term that royalists used to attack the Republic and that was later taken up by other antirepublican writers and activists.