



Why the Battle? Different God, Different Gospel

Module Four – Anthropology
How We Know What We Know
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Of the 6 modules in this class, this may be the one which requires us to put on our thinking caps the most. Tonight we want to talk about two things together, first, how we know what we know, and the second is the nature of human beings as men and women. These two themes tie deeply together at the beginning of the 21st century.

So let us begin with the question of how we know what we know, what the philosophers call epistemology.

I commence with a CS Lewis quote that I want to read two times so we can let it sink in.

“For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men...”

For our purposes the key insight of Lewis to focus on is the idea that in the ancient world you had an individual man or woman with a soul and body who approached reality, something that was out there, external to them.

The way you would seek to know in such a world is to seek to understand the external which had a given order, a given structure, and most of our predecessors would have understood this framework to have been given by God.

So if I were to drop you into the medieval world, say, the 12th century, the average person would have understood his or her life as given by the Roman Catholic Church, the seasons of nature, and the norms and structures of a feudal society. It would be by the nature of these externals which were seen as God given that he would go about the work and worship of his days on earth.

If I were to drop you into the life of Robert Boyle, an early chemist in the 17th century, you would see him talking about his life as an exploration of the two books, the book of nature and the book of Scripture, both wonderful gifts from God.

The enlightenment in the 17th and 18th century began a sea change in this area, best captured in a line of Alexander Pope’s poetry. In his *Essay on Man* he writes:

“Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.”

There you see the central shift from God to human beings. So for example, when Descartes says 'I think therefore I am' he is beginning with himself and his ability to think as the place from which he will orient himself to the world. To this approach which emphasized the rational, we need to add the new priority of Romanticism, a movement in the late 1700's that emphasized inspiration, passion and feelings as part of the equation. Now this romp through history needs to go at a fast pace, so we simply note in passing the shift from a primary agrarian world in the 17th and 18th century, to a more urban and suburban world in the 20th.

In this world in America in the 1950's we have the rise of a whole new aspect of modern life, that of the consumer economy built on credit. If we had time we could talk about Levittown after the Second World War, and the idea of a family having their own house with a white picket fence and 2.2 children and a dog. The key picture in our survey, however, is that we add to the thinking and feeling individual person the shopping and purchasing person to which an entire corporate and advertising world is devoted to serving.

Even still, in the 1950's, however, though the starting point was more the individual in all these aspects, his or her life would still be shaped by what sociologist Peter Berger called "mediating structures," that is, places of worship, communities with civic life, families of more than one generation, state and national political life, and so on.

For the next three decades, two things happen of interest to us. First, all these mediating structures begin to collapse and disintegrate. In his famous 2000 book *Bowling Alone* sociologist Robert Putnam shows how things like bowling leagues which used to be a regular feature of weekly life simply disappeared.

The second is an ever greater rise in the emphasis on the therapeutic in general, combined with an ever greater expressive individualism on the other. This is well captured in Robert Bellah's 1985 book *Habits of the Heart* where he discovers a woman who believes in Sheilaism, a religion entirely constructed by Sheila for Sheila, to which only Sheila adheres.

Now if you have stayed with me in this admittedly very broad brush survey, we come to the climactic moment, in of all places a 1992 Supreme Court decision entitled *Casey versus Planned Parenthood*. Justice Anthony Kennedy in that ruling said this which I am also going to read twice because of its importance: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life..."

It is hard fully to put into words what a revolution is involved in going from the ancient world's way of knowing to this new way, where we are no longer bowling alone, we are virtual bowling at home alone. We in the 21st century have nothing less than the free right to define everything, including the universe and the mystery of life itself.

Now that we have considered the question of how we know what we know, let us return to the other question in front of us, the nature of human beings.

The Christian Tradition with a capital T understands that we are created by God as men and women in his image and that this is part of the givenness of the reality in which we live. This is something clearly taught in the book of Scripture, as well as the book of nature in terms of the structure of the differing bodies of men and women.

The Roman Catholic catechism is very helpful here in unpacking the implications of this in some detail in its section on the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

2331 ... "God created man in his own image . . . male and female he created them";¹¹⁶ He blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply";¹¹⁷ "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created."¹¹⁸

***2332** Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others.*

***2333** Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity. Physical, moral, and spiritual difference and complementarity are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out.*

***2334** "In creating men 'male and female,' God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity."¹¹⁹ "Man is a person, man and woman equally so, since both were created in the image and likeness of the personal God."¹²⁰*

***2335** Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way. The union of man and woman in marriage is a way of imitating in the flesh the Creator's generosity and fecundity: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."¹²¹ All human generations proceed from this union.¹²²*

There are a whole number of lovely themes elucidated here. Let me comment on those most applicable to the question we are considering. First, men and women exist as a mysterious psychosomatic unity, a combination of body and soul. Bodiliness is a central part of our humanity, which is why the creation narrative in Genesis describes us as being made bodily creatures. As the perfect man, Jesus came with a particular body which was part of the essence of who he was. Our ultimate destiny is to live with new and glorified bodies in heaven with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever.

Second, the psychomatic unity we were created with includes a given sexual identity which impacts not simply our bodily functions but all of who we are, our will, our feelings, our thoughts, our creativity and on and on. Because this sexual identity is a given everyone “should acknowledge and accept it.”

Third, men and women are made both with a difference and a complementarity. This adds to the variety and mystery of human life in delightful and challenging ways, and is particularly oriented “toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life.” Part of the givenness of our creation as men and women therefore also includes a proper understanding of marriage. Marriage is part of the good of creation and is also a dimension of the givenness of the order God calls us to inhabit. The ACNA catechism on the question of what marriage is worth citing here also:

128. *What is marriage?*

Marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, binding both to self-giving love and exclusive fidelity. In the rite of Christian marriage, the couple exchange vows to uphold this covenant. They do this before God and in the presence of witnesses, who pray that God will bless their life together. (Genesis 2:23-24; Matthew 19; Mark 10:2-9; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39)

129. *What is signified in marriage?*

The covenantal union of man and woman in marriage signifies the communion between Christ, the heavenly bridegroom, and the Church, his holy bride. Not all are called to marriage, but all Christians are wedded to Christ and blessed by the grace God gives in marriage. (Ephesians 5:31-32)

We are going to have a lot more to say about the theology of marriage later in this series, but for tonight just note what the questions and answers in these sections in the ACNA catechism say about humanness. There are only two states: marriage and singleness. Those are the only two states of humanness about which the church has ever spoken. We all acknowledge that all aspects of the given order of things have been corrupted by sin, but it is a corruption of this created and given framework. We also acknowledge that great skill and pastoral care will have to be applied in the many different situations arising as people wrestle with these two states, but that pastoral application always comes against the background of the clear standard laid out in the two Q&A’s above.

If this is the perspective of the Christian tradition, let us now turn to the perspective of 21st century American expressive individualism. With the self as the arbiter of all aspects of reality including the universe and the mystery of life, the self has become the arbiter of sexual identity.

You can see this in the new language and categories which have begun to be used. Sexual identity has been shifted to the more abstract gender identity, and now “birth sex” and “biological sex” are different from, and able to be in conflict with, gender identity. This radical subjectivity has now even led to the point where some people contend the “assignment” of sex at birth is a human rights violation.

Whereas the Roman Catholic catechism argues that “everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity” the situation now is precisely the opposite. A person’s sexual identity is no longer the product of nature or creation; the new language suggests every aspect of it is socially constructed.

Therefore the all-knowing, all-determining self can declare all sorts of sexual identities into being. As someone born with a male body and a man’s sexual identity, I can declare myself a bisexual as an adolescent, or later in my middle life, or at any other stage based on my feelings or preferences or any other criteria that I see fit to employ.

If I declare myself as one born a boy later to be a girl, I am not merely a boy who identifies as a girl, according to a number of our contemporaries, I AM a girl and am to be treated in every way as such. These are breathtaking metaphysical and ontological claims all flowing from Justice Kennedy’s astonishing argument about the freedom I have a right to exercise.

Such a new world includes an ever-expanding panoply of possibilities the experiencing self can claim—Intersex, Asexual, Pangender, and many others. A 2014 article about Facebook elucidated—and I exaggerate not—51 of what it called “gender options” with which an individual could identify himself or herself as a social media user.

In terms of this radical new understanding of humanness in the church, the Episcopal Church enshrined exactly this in its General Convention when it adopted two canons in 2012. One of these, resolution D019, reads as follows:

“Resolved, That Title I, Canon 17, Sec. 5 of the Canons of The Episcopal Church be hereby amended to read as follows:

Sec. 5. No one shall be denied rights, status or access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified by Canons.”

Notice carefully the new insertion of the words “gender identity and expressions” into this list, with all the worldview implications that come with those terms.

We have to state very clearly what has happened here. This endorses BOTH an unchristian way of knowing, AND an unchristian theology of men and women.

Between this approach and the understanding of Scripture and the Christians who have come before us a great gulf is fixed. We in the Diocese of South Carolina stand on the side of the book from God and the world God has made as they are given to us. In CS Lewis’ words, we will not seek to subdue reality to our wishes, rather we will seek to conform ourselves, souls and bodies, to reality. We can do no other, so help us God.