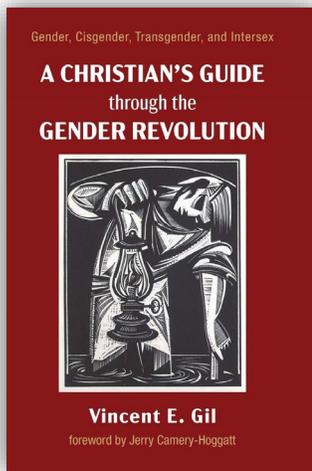


## BOOK REVIEW

# A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution

By Vincent E. Gil

Reviewed by Dena Loder-Hurley



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Vincent Gil walks with purpose into an area many Christians would rather avoid in his book, *A Christian's Guide Through the Gender Revolution*. He begins his book by defining the current moment, The “Now” of Gender, distinguishing between gender identity and sexual orientation, “who turns one on, or whether or not the Bible prohibits it” (1). From the beginning he clarifies that he is addressing questions of identity and gender as well as what—and who—determines and decides the answers. He utilizes Chapter Two to define and clarify the terms and concepts necessary to understand and engage in the current conversation.

After setting the stage, he invites the reader to understand the real heart of the matter: people. He states and restates his purpose: “. . . to ensure that those whom we refer to . . . remain clearly in our line of vision as persons. Persons who deserve our understanding, and more” (34). Those who have not

been personally touched by matters of gender identity, gender dysphoria, or intersex, either in their own lives or in the lives of those they love, may thoughtlessly approach the matter with the compassion and tenderness required to solve an algebraic equation. Gil paints the picture of the challenges and difficulties individuals and their loved ones often face.

Having humanized the conversation, Gil dives into deeper, more complex aspects of the conversation, using the language of Psalm 139:14 as a springboard: “. . . I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” He examines the Hebrew words and grammar, identifying the idiomatic intent and meaning, before examining biological realities and complexities that may surprise those who believe they already understand basic embryonic and fetal development. Fearfully and wonderfully made indeed. His intention is not to blur or confuse but rather to highlight and clarify a complexity that both exists and can result in post-birth uncertainty or ambiguity. Just because something may be statistically uncommon does not make it unnatural. “The effects of genetics and hormones can yield body morphologies that at times don’t conform to a binary model—at all” (83). Some will argue that a lack of conformity to the binary model is the result of living in a fallen world, and Gil addresses this argument specifically in Chapter Seven, Christianity and the Gender Crucible, revisiting the theology of gender.

Gil further humanizes the issues by recognizing beyond-the-norm parenting challenges when a child is intersex or has conflicts regarding their gender identity. He speaks both pastorally and clinically, encouraging parents to seek help rather than go it alone and then walking through different options and decisions available to them. He gives advantages and disadvantages as well as ramifications for the long term and explores different therapeutic approaches, including a chapter dedicated to the exploration of biological therapies. Ultimately, he advocates for time and therapy over a potentially rushed decision, a

suggestion that may be understood as controversial and even hostile in some settings.

Gil addresses clergy and church leadership, giving guidelines and resources. The first step in ministering effectively is to examine and identify any preconceptions, generalizations, and stereotypes a leader may have, especially as those may lead to prejudice and a posture of “rejecter first” rather than “one who listens and welcomes exploration,” open to walking alongside someone with gender conflicts (177). He reminds readers of the politics of caring, drawing on the example of Jesus who was derisively called “a friend to sinners.” Separate from doctrinal or theological positions, those leaders who “allow,” let alone care for, an individual or family to work through their issues or questions will experience criticism and judgment, the cost of caring.

Holding space for complexity and nuance while advocating for greater kindness, compassion, and care in the church’s response does not translate to an unwillingness to take a clear position. In articulating and clarifying these complexities, Gil also argues for a well-defined distinction between intersex and diagnosable gender-identity disorder and “a social movement of expressive individualism and self-representation” (194). He urges Christians to resist cultural ideologies which denigrate sex/gender distinctions and to encourage fellow believers in this struggle to allow Christ to influence their ideology (199). This distinction shapes Gil’s recommendation of a distinctly Christian response to “Transgender Activism,” distinguishing an ideology of radical self-expression and individualism from objectively diagnosable gender-identity conflicts. He draws on medical anthropology to classify much of today’s “gender rebellion” as a “culture-bound syndrome” (200).

A cursory glance of the book quickly reveals the broad and ambitious scope and may leave a potential reader questioning the feasibility of such an undertaking. Gil’s purpose is to create a resource that will equip the church with better answers for contemporary issues in service to parents and clergy who need it, addressing gender and identity through the distinctly Christian lens of mercy and reconciliation. He draws extensively on the work of other scholars throughout various disciplines, including theology, psychology, history, sociology, and more, resulting in a holistic approach that accomplishes the intended goal. In many respects, Gil does the work of an anthropologist, observing and

reporting on the current reality, often unknown and misunderstood, before placing it in the context of history by tracing the development and shifts of thought. He not only affirms the inherent worth and dignity of all people, but he also advocates for better treatment of those facing these questions, conflicts, and struggles personally. They are image bearers who deserve understanding as well as deference, the recognition that they need not defend their experience and reality nor is it patently sinful or wrong to have these questions, conflicts, or struggles.

Those seeking certainty in matters of gender identity will be disappointed. And skipping to the end will not reveal step-by-step instructions for “handling” questions or situations surrounding intersex or gender dysphoria. And that is not a weakness of the book. Rather than a playbook, he suggests a way of being and a way of thinking that will not only inform the current moment but could also prepare readers for the future, as the conversation continues and develops. He highlights and clarifies the complexity and nuance in a way that makes room for pursuing greater understanding and dialogue.

Rejecting a rigid either-this-or-that framework of extremes necessarily places Gil in the messy middle. He diligently clarifies the arguments and positions throughout the text and in footnotes which results in dense reading demanding the reader’s full attention. The messy middle will leave some readers complaining that he did not go far enough in this direction or that one. Still, having walked alongside individuals and families throughout his life, career, and ministry, Gil willingly steps into the minefield in service to those who had no other option.



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