



Embodied: Exploring The Dignity & Purpose of the Human Body & Sexuality

In the wake of the Dobbs decision, the war in America between a culture of life and a culture of death is more apparent than ever. The human body has become a battleground for various arguments over the extent and purpose of bodily autonomy, the nature and definitions of man and woman, the dignity of sexuality, and the proper regard for fertility. As Catholics, we must be cognizant of the immense and widespread traumas surrounding these issues for so many of our peers and of the extent of the misinformation regarding these topics and the Church's teachings on these topics. Many attempts have been made at dialogue regarding policies of bodily identity and real autonomy, sexuality, fertility, and safety, with often little positive effect.

The modern milieu is a travesty of the incarnational faith and proposes at once two fallacies: that the body is accidental to a person's identity and can be disregarded or drastically altered at will; and that the body, especially through sexuality, ought to be idolized. In neither proposal is the body viewed rightly, because neither properly understand the body in relation to personhood. The human person is not body alone but is embodied.

In her essay on the "Principles of Women's Education," St. Edith Stein likens the soul's relationship with the body to an inner form "in the seed of plants" that "urges the evolution into a certain direction and works towards a certain *gestalt* in blind singleness of purpose." The soul guides the body in a relationship of complementarity. When the body is disregarded as if it were not a gift from God or when sensual pleasures are mistaken for ultimate goods, however, both body and soul lose their proper characters.

Where the danger lies, there too is the saving power. As Stein writes in "Spirituality of the Christian Woman," the more intimate the relationship between the soul and body, the greater the possibility "that the soul will spiritualize the body." It is only through our bodies that our universal vocation to self-sacrificial love can be realized.

As Catholics and particularly as young people, we long for a just and true understanding of the dignity and purpose of our bodies and sexualities and the disillusionment of our peers. Conscious of the gravity of the wounds experienced by our brothers and sisters in the realms of bodily identity, sexuality, fertility, and safety, we remember the necessity of compassion and dialogue—truth spoken with love. With open arms, minds, and spirits, then, we invite you to attend "Embodied: Exploring The Dignity & Purpose of the Human Body & Sexuality," the eighteenth annual Edith Stein Conference presented by the Identity Project of Notre Dame March 24-25, 2023 at the University of Notre Dame. We are excited to welcome conference attendees to join us in person for prayer, conversation, contemplation, and service. We welcome submissions of abstracts for paper presentations. Please join us!