

REDEEMING GENDER

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Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir's phrase "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," I will examine the particularity argument of gender theory. This argument separates sex and gender by claiming that particular cultural differences negate a common essence to each sex. By engaging particularity theologically and culturally, my aim is to respond to gender theory's most urgent theoretical and personal questions.

What is an appropriate methodology for such an endeavor? Following St. John Paul II, I propose examining the Word of God through the experience of faith. Thus, we must look at sex and gender in Scripture through the experiential "treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture" (GS, 44). Similar to the spectrum seen when light shines on a prism, for which the particular composition of the prism is essential for the multiplicity of colors, various cultural expressions of gender will refer back to, and help to better understand, the composition of sex.

To this end, I plan to interview experts in 14 cultures regarding their experiences of masculinity and femininity. These phenomenological interviews will elucidate previous Scriptural work on sex, positing that men image God as Creator and women image God as Savior. Initial interviews with Native Americans indicate the cultural importance of men providing spiritually for their families, similar to the Creator, and that women seek, even in situations of abuse, to redeem the men of their Nation, thus imaging the Savior. By pursuing this methodology, gender theory and particularity can be fruitfully engaged.