



You’ve probably never heard of Frank Wilczek. Frank is a theoretical physicist with a penchant for looking under the hood of what we’ve called our “perceived reality”—for over fifty years!

For the work he’s done in that time, Frank now has a Nobel Prize, awarded for discoveries most of us can’t fathom. Most recently, he was granted the Templeton (Foundation) Prize, given exclusively to those who “explore the deep questions of the universe and humankind’s place and purpose within it.” Mind you, he’s in pretty incredible company here: The Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Jane Goodall of ape fame, and Sister (now Saint) Teresa of Kolkata.

This Nobel Laureate has an appetite for eyeballing the underbelly of the cosmos—detecting *axions*, “*time crystals*,” *anyons*, putting out theories on dark matter—and more at home, those mundane things that *we* hardly pay attention to—but *he* does, “for over fifty years”! Most transfixing for Frank is the array of color that shows up all over the universe, and here at home.

He notices and wants *us* to notice those myriad colorific displays which appear in sprays of water hit by the sun; in soap bubbles; in spilled oil on the road; and of course, in the arc of rainbows in the sky. His is a scientific reverie about what makes all of this possible. . . most intriguing for him is how light is refracted *as colors*, not as their absence.¹

We should then agree that color is fundamental to lighting the world!

Many cultures have already come to that conclusion—color, in variegation, in patterns, in solids—make for environments that are vibrant, alive, friendly, welcoming. Some places, however, have concluded that an *absence* of color, or an *achromatic template*, would appear more soothing and welcoming. Such is the case of the master-planned City of Irvine (CA). In the late 1960’s, the Irvine Company determined that an achromatic palette of beiges and browns, including terracotta for roofs, would be *the* schema to employ in building Irvine’s myriad “villages.”

What resulted is a boring sameness which now dominates eyes in Irvine: Nearly three quarters of the city, and certainly most construction put up by the Irvine Company proper has resisted wavering from beiges and browns. Many areas are upscale and fooshy, yet one can easily

¹ Frank Wilczek, *Fundamentals: Ten Keys to Reality*. Penguin Books, 2022.

mistake place and geography because everything looks the same. (Frank would never live in Irvine.)

The fundamental lesson here is that *color, variety, is the spice of life*. . . a saying we are all too familiar with, and which we often disavow as carrying much truth, except for admitting spice can be piquant. Colorations, too, may have effects other than “vibrant”—some being too ‘hot’ or ‘alerting’—but they are necessary to enlarge our experiences and refuse sameness. Even nature itself continuously changes things through ecology, biology, and color. God created a lot of diversity *with unique colorations!*

Boxes, Colors, and the Church

So how did we Christians wind up with ideologies that cancel out variety, “color,” in how we understand men and women? How did we get to *achromatize* what a man/male should be, what a woman/female should be? And is it possible, given our present “gender moment” that we’re being heralded into a spectrum of human chromatics?

“Foundational narratives,” as early OT histories are called, have been historically interpreted as laying the groundwork for what men and women ‘should be all about’. In doing so, hermeneutical and exegetical explanations generate assumptions, such as God determining gender by determining two sexes.² In such views what flows from sex then organically palettes the male into *manliness*; palettes the female into *femininity*. What masculinity or femininity mean become idealized—stereotyped—over time and generations. We socialize and constrain within these boundaries.

But *gender*, however, is an affective and role-related construction based on more than one’s sexual biology. It’s correct to think sexual biology as the initiating template, yet there’s a lot more to gender than foundational, biological sex. Gender gets constructed via myriad influences, beginning with the body and how it signals us through hormone action and physical development. Gender development doesn’t stop there, however: the culture we are born in; the influences that come to bear on our lived experiences, both of our bodies and our social interactions; and ultimately, those emotions (affects) which become templates themselves for how we understand ourselves, all contribute to our consciousness of self—thus, our gender identity development.

Epistemic foundations laid down by church fathers have presumed that gender organically and only grows out of our sex; but as I’ve argued elsewhere more fully, such it a wrong conclusion.³ Unfortunately, the church has ‘boxed gender’ in ways that *achromatize*, that generate stereotyped

² Actually, we now understand that after *procreation* enters the picture, we reproduce male, female, and intersex offspring. While the number of intersex persons is small, they should be counted and considered:

³ See Gil, Vincent, *A Christian’s Guide to the Gender Revolution. Gender, Cisgender, Transgender, and Intersex*. Cascade Publishers, 2021. The idea, for example, that being a woman naturally produces *femininity*, and that these qualities and characteristics organically flow from how the body sculpts temperament, ability, voice, behavior and thinking, leaves out all other influences which are equally, if not sometimes more potent, than biology in forming gender identity. Cultural gender schemas—how a culture “oughts” gender through its ideology, socialization of children, education, etc.—are potent influences on how one internalizes self-perceptions of being a woman, or a man, and acting as one.

masculinities and stereotyped femininities. These constrict the possible palettes, often taking away any ‘color’ variegations—akin to “blue [only] is for boys and pink is [only] for girls.”

Where do these achromatic ‘boxes’ come from?

They are constructed from patriarchal assumptions which themselves are rooted in religious culture histories, histories that segregate men from women; that establish rigid boundaries which control people, and sometimes *maim the other* in favor of a rigid schema.⁴ Old Testament laws, for example, were full of sex-gender boundaries: what should be worn by men, by women; what length of hair, what hygiene laws apply to each, etc. Judaic law distilled these into prerogatives which perhaps at the time were necessary to differentiate the people of God from those not destined to receive promises made to Abraham. But in doing so, rigid gender schemas evolved, were then idealized (read *Songs of Solomon!*) and sadly, carried forward for millennia. The Christian church continued to profess stereotypic assumptions about gender, and still expects achromatized gender differences despite the salvific work of Christ and his fulfilling the law for us all.⁵

Unboxing, Chromatizing the Church

For millenia now, the Christian church has more-or-less adhered to ideas that underscore what we now call *male privilege*, *female inequality*, along with notions of what “real men” or “real women” ought to be about—ought to, *look like act like, think like*, heck, even *smell like*.

To deconstruct some of these stereotypes, we need to understand how dramatic cultural changes began pushing society—and the church—into a more equitable stance for and about men and women. Not all cultural change is wrong or inappropriate: In the 1990’s, younger generations began to question the artifices of gendered selves, those roles required to maintain masculinity and femininity and what these in fact meant in lived experiences. We saw men begin to seriously parent their offspring, being able to change diapers in public male restrooms because these had (finally) been pushed to include pull-down infant changing tables, etc. Men were changing role dynamics—relegating some of that *privilege* and putting on aprons to cook, to learn laundry, to stay home and rear their children. Women broke through *glass ceilings* and challenged corporate businesses to include them as the leaders they truly were. What constituted masculinity, what constituted femininity began to change, and so did the ideological frames that supported them.

In similar fashion, such social changes presaged a revolution in gender ideology in the early 2000’s which we are now experiencing...not all of it acceptable to Christians (for sundry reasons

⁴ And women continuously got more of the maiming: On top of polygamy, there is female slavery, the presence of concubines, death prescribed for sexual sins, separation from the community during a monthly cycle, widows forced to marry the brother of their late husbands, arranged marriages, pagan women slaughtered in battles, and so on.

⁵ We continue to quote Old Testament verses regarding what men should wear or not wear, what length of hair these should have, etc., even when the Gospels underscore it isn’t how we look, or what we wear, what we eat, that makes us righteous. Even eunuchs were embraced in the redemptive act of salvation, as were those described in Judaic law as *tutums, androgynos, ayilonits, and saris*. (All these would fit under our *transgender* label today.)

discussed in my 2021 book), yet certainly pushing the church to do better justice on how it configures its views of males and females in dogma—and in fact.⁶ Simultaneously, evidence from social and behavioral sciences, began understanding gender as a construction from many influences, and led to a recognition that stereotyped fabrications of gender ought to be deconstructed, and repented from. In other words, how the church has viewed how men express their sex and gender, how women express their sex and gender, need not be stated so rigidly that we box in human creativity and expression.

Thus of late, even some fundamental evangelical denominations like the *Assemblies of God* have realized the need for making public their apologies on how former stereotypical perceptions of people—males, females, and even trans in this case—led some to wrongs: in judgments, in deference to biases, and to exclusions:

While the Bible does not directly address transgender identity or a transgender lifestyle as such, it does recognize that individuals may make choices that are at variance with their birth sex. . . **This is not to say that there should be an entirely rigid and unreasonable standard for expressing a particular gender based on cultural stereotypes. . .**

There is [also] often a failure to address unloving attitudes toward people with views and practices that are different. Ministry to trans persons—and LGBT persons more generally—acknowledges and repents of unloving words and deeds that have been spoken or done toward them.⁷

Are we finally getting to the place in the Church where we allow for human colorations?

We've certainly relaxed what *clothing type* we wear to church, influences from the culture at large that took nothing away from the meaning of worship—in fact, such changes allowed us to unstarch, and loosen up more in worship.

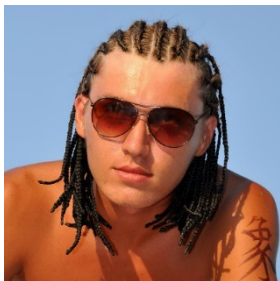
Culturally, men have jumped over barriers that externally constricted masculinity to the stereotype, in the process, redefining what masculinity 'looks like'.

Nothing can illustrate the change better than contemporary men's variegation in clothing, now also visible among Christians; and haircuts (or lack of them.) It seems the church is no longer yelling for men to not appropriate things traditionally and culturally cued 'feminine,' because they have realize these are cultural constructions and not divine dictates. (Remember, Christ fulfilled, and thus freed us from the law.) Men have now colorized! Floralized!

Take a peek (some of the men in the pictures are pastors!):

⁶ See Gil, *A Christian's Guide*, 2021, Chapter 7.

⁷ Position paper from the Assemblies of God, *Transgenderism, Transsexuality, and Gender Identity* (2017, pp.15-16. <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Topics-Index/Transgenderism-Transsexuality-and-Gender-Identity>.



These illustrations clearly show that none of what is seen takes away from men *being* men. In fact, it places colors, patterns, designs, cuts of hair and styles in a much more *neutral category of artifacts*, thus diminishing our capacity to *use* artifacts to stereotype people. When such changes happen, and people are no longer judged by how or what they wear, or look like, personal expression can come out of the shadows and into refracted light!

Changing Gender or Freeing Gender?

Nothing said so far suggests we are talking about changing one's biological sex (*transgenderism*), changing the core of one's gender identity (*gender non-conformity*), or even what sex one is attracted to (*sexual orientation*). These elements are critically important in today's discussions of sex and gender identity, elements which I've dedicated an entire book to exploring,⁸ but they are not focal here. What *is* focal to this conversation is an understanding that our notions and conceptions of gendered selves *is* changing—how we *express* our identity as men, as women, is changing.

The change isn't just about cultural narratives 'pushing' gender change, although that is part of what happens, since all cultures change over time (they are a product of human social interaction) and narratives people use to both teach and explain change.

It's more about individuals coming to terms with how culture boxes have achromatized much of who we become, how we act, how we show the world who we are (supposed to be): the 'performative' part of our gender—what we learn to become; what we learn and then use to identify, to identify others *like us*, and *not like us*.

Christianity, we've said, has held on to notions of masculinity and femininity that are out of step with contemporary culture. That statement doesn't mean culture trumps beliefs; it means we've discovered (in large part thanks to the gender revolution) that we don't need these notions to remain as godly **men** and **women**. We don't need achromatized boxes, since those boxes themselves are being dismantled as we gain hermeneutical and exegetical insights into what God really intended for the sexes when humankind was created: *mutuality and complementarity*, "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23); an alterity that isn't based on differences, but rather on similarities.

The Church needs to revisit and revise understandings of gendered selves, sufficiently to cast off stereotypes in expression, and allow variegation that human creativity enables. As the *Assemblies of God* quote above reveals, coming to terms with the injustices done by presuming differences equal godly offenses is a good thing. We now understand that 'color'—the possibilities of spectral expressions are part of one's God-given creativity.

Colorization! Understanding that ought to affirm we as Christians are fulfilling an important biblical mandate: to be welcoming, accepting, of differences of self-expression in ways that enable the person, not puts them down.

This doesn't mean we ignore Rousseau's historic precedent. Rousseau, in 1762 helped the



Bring color into the lives of others
and you will paint a different world.

— Christopher Garrett

⁸ Gil, *A Christian's Guide*, 2021.

Western world realize we choose to live within a social contract, giving up some of our personal rights for the benefit of the rights of the majority.⁹ That *also* means we live without judging the other for what appears to us, personally, to be incorrect. The Apostle Paul stressed to Romans, Galatians, and Corinthians much of the same philosophy: don't judge your neighbor; be at peace with your neighbor; help yourself not to be judged by what you approve or disapprove! (Rom 14:22).

Anthrotechnologist Christopher Garrett's words above resound here: *Bring color into the lives of others and you will paint a different world.*¹⁰ Frank Wilczek would then say we got the universe's message right!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 1762.

¹⁰ Christopher Garrett at <http://christophergarrett.co>.

