Vatican



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Editor's note: *This story was updated at 9 a.m. Central time.*

The Vatican office responsible for overseeing Catholic educational institutions around the world has blasted modern gender theory, claiming in a new document that it seeks to "annihilate the concept of 'nature.' "

In an instruction released June 10 as LGBT people globally are celebrating pride month, the Congregation for Catholic Education calls the idea of people's gender identities existing along a spectrum "nothing more than a confused concept of freedom in the realm of feelings and wants."

Labeling the biological differences between men and women "constitutive of human identity," the office also questions the intentions of those who identify as intersex and transgender.

"Efforts to go beyond the constitutive male-female sexual difference, such as the ideas of 'intersex' or 'transgender,' lead to a masculinity or femininity that is ambiguous," states the document.

"This oscillation between male and female becomes, at the end of the day, only a 'provocative' display against so-called 'traditional frameworks,' " it continues.

The document, which carries the title "Male and female he created them," was released by the Vatican June 10 without prior announcement. Described as an aid for Catholic schoolteachers and parents, it is signed by the educational congregation's leaders: Italians Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi and Archbishop Angelo Zani.

The educational aid does not carry Pope Francis' signature, and the text makes no reference of the pontiff reviewing the document.

Groups that minister to LGBT Catholics immediately criticized the document. New Ways Ministry, one such group, called it a "harmful tool that will be used to oppress and harm not only transgender people, but lesbian, gay, [and] bisexual people, too."

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Francis, whose early pontificate was defined by his "Who am I to judge?" answer to a question about an alleged gay priest working at the Vatican, has made contradictory remarks about gender theory and transgender people throughout his six-year papacy.

In a 2015 interview, for example, the pontiff compared gender theory to nuclear weapons, saying the concept "does not recognize the order of creation." But in 2016, the pope revealed in a press conference that he had met at the Vatican with a Spanish transgender man who had been ostracized by his parish priest after having gender reassignment surgery.

"We must be attentive, not saying all are the same," Francis said about that experience, adding that "people must be accompanied, as Jesus accompanied."

The new document, which is 31 pages in length, does not speak of accompanying transgender people. It instead issues fierce warnings and criticisms of how children and young people are being educated today.

The text opens by saying that society is facing "an educational crisis, especially in the field of affectivity and sexuality."

It then claims that cultural "disorientation" has destabilized the family as an institution, "bringing with it a tendency to cancel out the differences between men and women, presenting them instead as merely the product of historical and cultural conditioning."

The heart of the document critiques modern society's detachment of an individual's concept of gender from their biological sex.

"Gender theory … speaks of a gradual process of denaturalization, that is a move away from nature and towards an absolute option for the decision of the feelings of the human subject," it states.

"In this understanding of things, the view of both sexuality identity and the family become subject to the same 'liquidity' and 'fluidity' that characterize other aspects of post-modern culture, often founded on nothing more than a confused concept of freedom in the realm of feelings and wants, or momentary desires provoked by emotional impulses and the will of the individual," it continues.

The text claims that genetic studies have shown that male and female embryos differ "from the very moment of conception." In cases where a child is born with ambiguous genitalia, it says "it is medical professionals who can make a therapeutic intervention."

"In such situations, parents cannot make an arbitrary choice on the issue, let alone society," it recommends. "Instead, medical science should act with purely therapeutic ends, and intervene in the least invasive fashion, on the basis of objective parameters and with a view to establishing the person's constitutive identity."

Retelling the Genesis story of God creating humans in his image as men and women, the document calls for a reaffirming of "the metaphysical roots of sexual difference."

In a short section detailing some "points of agreement" with gender theory, the text praises educational programs that "share a laudable desire to combat all expressions of unjust discrimination, a requirement that can be shared by all sides."

"Indeed, it cannot be denied that through the centuries forms of unjust discrimination have been a sad fact of history and have also had an influence within the Church," it states.

"This has brought a certain rigid status quo, delaying the necessary and progressive inculturation of the truth of Jesus' proclamation of the equal dignity of men and women, and has provoked accusations of a sort of masculinist mentality, veiled to a greater or lesser degree by religious motives," it continues.

The document also praises anthropological studies that focus on the "values of femininity," lauding how "women's 'capacity for the other' favors a more realistic and mature reading of evolving situations.'"

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