Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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In early June, the Vatican office responsible for overseeing Catholic educational institutions around the world put out a document against modern gender theory, claiming that it seeks to "annihilate the concept of 'nature.' " NCR published a commentary in response by Paul J. Schutz, assistant professor in the religious studies department at Santa Clara University, where he points out three areas of concern about the instruction, in hopes of challenging Catholics of all stripes to celebrate the God-given diversity of gender expression. Relatedly, NCR recently

published letters to the editor responding to the firings of gay teachers at a Catholic high school. Many more readers wrote in response to those letters. Letters are edited for length and clarity.

The Congregation for Catholic Education states that the best methodology for meeting the needs of individuals and communities is to listen, to reason, and to propose. Then, the document outlines what the congregation has concluded by its own listening (sections 8-23), reasoning (sections 24-29), and proposing (sections 30-51). This discastery is not calling for dialog.

One can read an ecclesiology of "jurisdiction" throughout the document. Maintaining that the church seeks to develop "a network of relationships that are both more open and more human," while asserting that advocates of gender theory are "ideologically driven," reveals from the authors a real and ironic role reversal.



"Male and female" is "substantiated" by metaphysical notions that reflect a dated Augustinian mentality. It purports a current "crisis" whereby the church is a "shelter" from a dangerous world. It claims that ambiguity endorses human situations of sexual indeterminacy whose aim is "to annihilate the concept of nature."

It is easy to conclude that no one involved with the document spent any time listening to transgendered persons. Such persons are often "the least," the one Jesus spoke about, those who have experienced unimaginable abuse and pain and rejection. Sadly, in seeking authenticity, struggling to become who God created them to be, their greatest suffering has often been inflicted by the religious fervor of

those who hate their "difference."

The Catholic Church might do well to reconsider its doctrinal "guidance" at this time in history. An unparalleled clergy sex abuse scandal, a seismic loss of credibility, and an image of countless empty pews should cast us (clergy) into a posture of contrition and deep remorse. We have no right to sit in judgment.

The institutional church would benefit from an educational design that moves beyond self-listening, self-reasoning, and self-proposing, to a methodology that practices genuine listening, effective bridge building, and a true desire to bring about unity.

(Fr.) GREGORY M. CORRIGAN

Wilmington, Delaware

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This raises a question for me inspired by my personal experience as an old woman and a retired registered nurse for 50 years.

Although this is not based on science of any sort, it has been my observation that in general, cisgender women are much more accepting of non-cisgender people than are cisgender men. I find most cisgender men to be threatened and uncomfortable with the idea of LGBTQ+ people than are women.

I have my own personal theories about this, but I wonder why this appears to be the case, at least to me. Perhaps, if my observation is accurate, it could explain the magisterium's resistance to accepting what scientific evidence indicates to be valid.

ANNIE WRIGHT RONQUILLO

Pueblo West, Colorado

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It is important to remember that a document emanating secretly from the Vatican is not magisterial teaching and can and should be ignored. This is an excellent article

and needs to be read by all people involved in Catholic education.

NORBERT BUFKA

Midland, Michigan

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I am a lesbian living in Seattle. I am not a Catholic, though I almost became one during the time of Pope John XXIII, and I follow NCR to keep up on what's happening in the Catholic Church because it's teachings and actions affect society in general, not just Catholics.

I had only read a couple of paragraphs written by Paul Schultz when I started sobbing with gratitude for his thoughtful and thorough analysis. My God! Here is a Catholic scholar who considers me to be a legitimate full human being, not a sinner, an abomination on nature, a self-chosen pervert, or whatever words have been thrown at me over the years.

I would replace the words "male and female he created them" with the words "human beings he created them, in all their mysterious and beautiful diversity."

Again, thank you so much, Paul Schultz.

RUTH YEOMANS

Seattle, Washington

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In the conversation about gender, we need to ask some fundamental questions.

What is wrong with society that, in relation to gender identity a person is made to feel not right, not acceptable, just as that person is, and that medication or surgery is necessary for a person to be accepted without qualification?

We speak far more today about gender identities than I remember earlier in my 75 years. Is that because, although it was just as frequent a matter in the past, we are more open today about it? Or is it that it is a more frequent phenomenon today? Have we any way of knowing?

If it is a more frequent phenomenon today, do we understand how this should have come about? Is it a natural development in the human race, or does it come about through identifiable factors in society and the environment?

There are many endocrine disruptor chemicals in the environment. Some occur naturally. But many are the result of industrial processes. And a large number result from the intentional production of such chemicals for birth control, for assisted human reproduction, and some hormones are used in the production of our food. These leak into the environment. Do play a part in influencing sexual development, not just in their immediate use, but in subsequent generations? Do we need to address this question more seriously?

PÁDRAIG McCARTHY

Dublin, Ireland

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Why should anyone, Catholic or not, pay any attention to a policy on gender issues written by (mostly old) men, especially after the past 15 years of scandals around the world.

Sex crimes committed against women and children are the worst of the worst, yet the church covered up in so many ways for so long, rather than face the consequences (especially financial) of accountability. These are the last people to tell the rest of us how to relate sexually. And, in contrast to the teachings of Jesus, these clerics prefer to judge rather than to love.

RUTH ZEMEK

Phoenix, Arizona

An American archbishop has told a Jesuit Catholic school that it is no longer allowed to call itself "Catholic" because, in his opinion, the school is not giving witness to Catholic Identity — they failed to dismiss one of its staff members who is married to a same-sex partner.

The word "Catholic" means "universal."

To my mind that means the embrace of Christ is universal in its scope, all inclusive, all welcoming.

Where is the embrace of Christ when Catholic identity says: "You are divorced and remarried, so you are not welcome at the Lord's table." Or "You are a woman so you cannot be a minister of the sacred." Or "You are in a gay marriage so you cannot work in a Catholic institution."

RICHARD COOTES

Warner's Bay, New South Wales, Australia

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Seeing a television program this week regarding silencing Galileo I became aware that authority fearful of losing their power will continue to oppress their threat their power.

This was evidenced by a bishop firing gay teachers. A recent survey has found that 67% of Catholics accept gays.

The gays are an oppressed group. The scriptures have repeated that Jesus was on the side of the oppressed and not on the side of the powerful.

ANN DUFF

New Franklin, Ohio

Our Catholic Church, unfortunately, lives by a very clear set of double standards and makes and breaks its own rules at will. The firing of good gay Catholic teachers in Indiana is a travesty and a violation of the gospel of Jesus Christ by which we are all called to live. He said, "love one another, as I have loved you," without qualifiers like unless you're gay.

While it is true that in another age being gay was looked upon as a deviation, being intrinsically or objectively disordered, today, thankfully, psychology and all the sciences have been able to unleash the truth that all of us are created in the image and likeness of God regardless of our sexual orientation, and as such, are created naturally and equally to live, to love and to be loved, just as we are.

Thankfully, we have some great leaders in our church who see this and understand, some even in the "highest" places.

For those who continue to choose to live in another time and space, then I guess we have an awfully lot of objectively and intrinsically disordered church leaders, bishops and priests, and people in the pews.

(Fr.) ART SMITH

Buffalo, New York

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I have a granddaughter who is a lesbian. I have a grandson who is gay. Neither are teachers in a Catholic school.

However, since they were toddlers, the family realized how they were oriented. I firmly believe they had no choice in the matter. They were made in the image and likeness of God and He made them what they are. They are good people in marriages not accepted by the church.

Are these teachers being removed from their jobs good teachers? Are they respected by the students and parents? Maybe the church should change their way of thinking.

SUZANNE SHAY TRAVERS

West Hartford, Connecticut

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The touchstone of all that we do (and all our decisions), as Catholics, is Jesus. Very simply, Jesus. Jesus and his father love every single one of us unconditionally. So, we look at every life situation as we believe Jesus would look at it. If we do that, we can't go wrong.

Yes, some decisions are very difficult, but they got to be motivated by love.

I love NCR. You make sense. With Vatican II, Pope Francis and NCR, my hope for the future has never been greater.

Thank you for telling it like it is — with compassion and courage.

BILL JENNINGS

Simi Valley, California

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In response to the recent article concerning the firing of gay teachers at Catholic schools, I have two thoughts to share.

Long ago I gave up the idea that as Catholics we have a list of sins to consider when preparing for confession. I discarded that theology many years ago believing instead that sin is about my relationship with God. That is the yardstick I now use in examining my conscience. Habit and ways of behaving that lead me away from true holiness is sin. And it rests on the foundational belief that sin is always a failure to love. Judging others of sinful behavior doesn't ring true with me any longer. And firing people because we perceive them to be in a state of sin is presumptive and arrogant. No one can fully understand the God/person relationship except God.

Further I have long wondered why behavior of a sexual nature seems to take precedent every time over other types of "sinful" behavior. Cruelty, bigotry, arrogance, greed. Aren't these ways of behaving equally abhorrent? When was the last time you heard of a Catholic school "not renewing the contract" of a teacher because he/she was openly bigoted, cruel, or perhaps living in an adulterous relationship?

If I allowed only non-sinners at my Thanksgiving table, I am afraid there would be precious few sharing the feast. We all fall short at times of meeting the standard set for us by God. But we continue to work to follow the greatest commandment to love one another. Sin is always a failure to love.

COLLEEN WARTELLE

Everett, Washington

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In my opinion, the practice of all Roman Catholic educational institutions throughout the world should mandate that its teachers are practicing Catholics in good standing, meaning they believe and abide by the teachings of the Catholic Church. There is no room for those who wish to live in sin, such resulting in a bad influence towards the students whose aim is to strive for sanctification.

"Living in sin" is defined as those who believe in or are in common-law relationships, same-sex marriage, practicing homosexuals, supporters of abortion, and the likes.

Those who do not agree with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are free to choose any of the other 30,000 world religions that implement their personal beliefs.

JONN MILLER

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada

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I have decades of experience teaching in private and public schools. I have several friends who are gay and I can sincerely say that I love them.

If a gay teacher chooses to teach in a Catholic school, he/she must abide by that school's rules. Teach in a non-Catholic school if you intend to marry your partner and live in an active sexual relationship. I don't wish bad things on a gay marriage. I do expect that one strives to be a stable example of what the school professes.

KEN BOYER

St Louis, Missouri

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