



Pastoral letter

Jan. 17, 2016

A Basic Flaw in the Alberta Education's Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expression.

I want to begin by saying that I agree with the stated, overall intention of Alberta Education in issuing such “Guidelines”, namely, “to enable school authorities to use best practices in creating and supporting learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expression”. Indeed, we can all agree that safe and supportive schools are essential for all students regardless of their age, background or sexual orientation.

However, the document’s understanding of human nature (and sexual orientation) rests upon a premise that directly collides with and contradicts the Biblical understanding of human nature as well as our common life experience.

In its “Principles essential to best practices”, the document states,

“Self-identification is the sole measure of an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression”.

Certainly, most people interested in Education today in North America will agree that “self-identification” in sexual orientation has to be respectfully taken into account and to recognize that today nobody can be ostracized or rejected because they have difficulty accepting their biological gender.

But from there, to insist that it is the “sole measure” of an individual’s sexual orientation, is an anthropological step which is a major problem for Catholic Education as well as for many others.

To say that a person’s sexual orientation solely depends on self-identification denies biological facts as well as Biblical teaching.

In ordinary day-to-day experience, biology cannot be separated from culture and the separation of biological and social gender is a basic error and weakness of “gender theory”.

But for the Bible, and therefore for Catholicism and many others, femininity and masculinity are not exchangeable roles, but rather they are gifts and callings from the Creator.

To mandate that “self-identification is the sole measure of an individual’s sexual orientation” and in fact, by totally excluding biological fact, contradicts our common day-to-day life experience and also repudiates the goodness of Creation.

Therefore, the “Guidelines for Best Practices:” as a policy statement is flawed from the beginning because of a false premise and initial principle.

I therefore, as a Catholic Bishop in Alberta, must reject the “Guidelines for Best Practices:” for reasons of both faith and common sense.

I must add that the present Pope Francis has also spoken on this subject of ‘gender theory’. During the General Audience on April 15th 2015 he asked, “whether the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual differences.” He then continued saying, “ In this we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference between the sexes, in fact creates a problem, not a solution.”

Also during his visit to the Philippines he complained about “ideological colonialism” which consists in the way rich countries link the approval of international loans with the condition that gender theory be included in school curriculums.

Pope Benedict also addressed the subject of gender theory in his last Christmas message, as Pope, in Dec. 21, 2012. He said,

“The profound falsehood of this theory and the anthropological revolution contained within are obvious. People dispute the idea that they have a nature, given by their bodily identity, that serves as a defining element of the human being. They deny their nature and decide that it is not something previously given to them, but that they make it for themselves. According to the Biblical creation account, being created by God as male and female pertains to the essence of the human creature. This duality is an essential aspect of what being human is all about, as ordained by God. This very duality as something given is now disputed. The words ‘male and female he created them’ (Gen 1:27) no longer apply. No, what now applies is this: it was not God who created them male and female – hitherto society did this, now we decide for ourselves.”

Finally, the final document of Oct 24, 2015 of the recent Synod on the Family, identified gender theory as one of the fundamental challenges of our time saying,

“Such an ideology leads to educational projects and legislative planning which promote a personal identity and affective intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between masculine and feminine. Human identity is reduced to individual choice, which can even be changed in time. In the vision of faith, human sexual difference carries within it the image and likeness of God. (Gen 1: 26-27)”

Therefore, again, as a Catholic Bishop and as someone who has pastoral responsibility for children in Catholic Schools, I must reject the “Guidelines for Best Practices:” I do this so that the Biblical image of our human nature in its entire radiance and depth can orient and guide the children and youth of our Catholic schools.



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