

MEDIA RELEASE

TGI NETWORK

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TGI Network Responds to Discriminatory Letter from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

PROVIDENCE, RI (December 21st, 2017). Recently, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released a letter (cosigned by a few other conservative religious leaders) in which they attempt to set out the “truth” of gender identity in a single page. (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/promotion-and-defense-of-marriage/created-male-and-female.cfm>)

In the letter, the authors address four related concepts: the binary nature of human sexual identity, the belief that all humans deserve dignity, concerns about gender-variant children, and identifying those who suffer marginalization.

First of all, they claim that human biology only allows for two unique types of sexual identity, and that this is an established fact even though we’ve long known about all sorts of physical and genetic variations both small and significant. They also suggest that a person’s gender determines their place in society and the cultural rules they must obey.

Second, the letter’s authors insist that children and adults whose experience of their own identity differs from what is more common, should be listened to with respect. But at the same time, this “respect” really means telling them that they don’t know what they’re talking about and that they are lying.

Third, the authors of this letter make some especially troubling assertions about the most vulnerable among us: children. Studies have shown that when a gender-variant child has been properly diagnosed, acceptance and basic medical intervention lead to positive outcomes. But to take the course the authors suggest (that is, forcing children to aspire to some cultural stereotype and to act like someone they are not), can lead to higher rates of depression, isolation, and suicide. The authors remind health professionals to “do not harm,” but what they, themselves, advocate is quite harmful.

Finally, the authors make it very clear that the “real” victims are not those transgender people who have faced discrimination and violence, but rather these very religious leaders who are just trying to explain to transgender people that they should not be allowed to live their lives as their authentic selves.

For a person who is open to the insights of science, this letter can be seen as demonstrating an almost willful ignorance of the subtle and beautifully diverse nature of human sexuality, which is now becoming more understood through biology, sociology, and psychology. It also shows a lack of understanding of history and anthropology which have taught us that Western European cultural norms (including those having to do with gender and sexuality) are not, in fact, universal.

For a person of faith, this should be a disturbing letter because it presents a very limited understanding of God and creation. The authors insist that “What God created is good,” and by that they mean that everyone is perfect the way they were born and no one should be allowed to seek improvement or correction. But surely they would accept that God created all kinds of people with their own gifts and imperfections – short, brilliant, blind, slow, deaf, tall, skinny? Why can’t they accept that God created transgender people?

For a transgender person, the letter from these religious leaders, through its justification of bigotry, should be a cause for concern. Transgender people aren’t trying to “change sex,” they are just trying to be themselves. Yet this letter

encourages members of the religious community to ignore the reality of transgender people's lives and, instead, impose upon them a set of values and assumptions based in ignorance.

For any decent, compassionate, human being, this letter should be worrisome. While proclaiming "respect," it encourages disrespect. While asserting the dignity of all people, it actually declares that some are less worthy than others.

We are in the midst of a holiday season. People are looking for more light in their lives even though things seem to get darker. Choirs sing of peace and joy to the world, and they sing of hope and love toward all humankind. But this year, a few religious leaders have chosen to recognize the holidays by offering a very bitter and painful gift.