

# Time for healing, not lamenting

Bishop James Conley, Lincoln Nebraska, Tuesday, 17 May 2016

On Friday, May 13, the U.S. Department of Education and Department of Justice issued a joint instruction, which they called “significant guidance,” to public school districts across the country. The guidance stated that in order to receive federal funds for education, every public school district must provide services, restrooms, and “equal access” to all students according to their stated gender identity.

The federal government has ordered that when any student and his parents tell the school that his “gender identity” has changed—if he was born a boy, for example, but considers himself a girl—the school must treat him, in every possible way, like an actual girl. The government declared that the boy who says he is a girl must be permitted to change in locker rooms with girls, to stay in girls’ rooms on overnight trips, and, very often, to participate on girls’ sports teams.

This “guidance” is deeply disturbing. In fact, the administration’s action is simply wrong. It is wrong to deny the fundamental difference between men and women; and to teach children that our identity, at its very core, is arbitrary and self-determined. God created us male and female, and policies like this deny the basic beauty of God’s creation.

Boethius, the 6th century Roman senator and Christian philosopher, was a thoughtful critic of disturbing trends he saw in Roman society. In his classic work, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius criticized those evil spirits “who slay the rich and fruitful harvest of Reason with the barren thorns of Passion. They habituate men to their sickness of mind instead of curing them.”

We are living in a time when ordinary human reason is quickly being replaced by “the barren thorns of passion.” Our entire culture has been caught up in a kind of sentimentalized and relativized tyranny of tolerance: we vilify and condemn, ever more quickly, any sense of reasonable and ordered social policy. We have a vague sense that endorsing certain fashionable kinds of social and emotional disorders—including transgenderism—is a mandate of justice, or a victory for civil rights.

But the real victims of our culture of relativism are those who suffer from serious problems, and who need compassionate help. Pathological confusion about one’s own identity is a kind of illness. It brings tremendous personal and emotional difficulties. Transgenderism cries out for compassionate assistance. Pope Francis says that “acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital,” and “valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary” for authentic human freedom.

But, as Boethius wrote, we “habituate men to their sickness, instead of curing them.”

Children and parents in very difficult situations deserve compassion, sensitivity, and respect. The Church will continue to make every effort to assist those suffering gender dysphoria; in fact, we can improve our efforts in this regard in many ways. But the Church will not deny that God created us male and female. We will not confuse respect and compassion with

capitulation to a tragic delusion. Our Catholic schools will continue to teach and live the truth, because of our care for every student. We can only help students grow in holiness when we help them to live in accord with the truth. We will continue to do that, no matter the cost.

The Obama administration’s directive is a sign of the brokenness of our culture; of our lost sense of the common

good, of individual goodness, of true freedom, real rights, and authentic happiness. Nebraska’s Governor Pete Ricketts pointed out earlier this week that this directive is basically a kind of coercive opinion, which does not enjoy the authority of law. It is a form of bullying and, ultimately, it is a sad sign of how much we have lost our way; how little of the Gospel’s good news forms and shapes our culture.

This directive is a sign of a great tragedy. We are living in an atheocracy [atheist or irreligious state]: a society determined to stamp out every vestige of God’s plan for mercy, and justice, and goodness. We are living in a society ensnared by the evil of relativism, to which human flourishing, in this life and the next, poses a threat.

The Gospel is a threat to the forces of this world. And in such a circumstance, there is a great temptation, for all of us, to withdraw into our families, into our Catholic community, into those places which we believe are safe, places in which we think we might be spared from the evil of this world.

But facing an evil world, Boethius wrote that “it is time for healing, not lamenting.” Boethius was right. Our culture is in need of healing. The victims of relativism’s dictatorship—those who are harmed by false compassion and tolerance for evil—need our help. Only we can be the leaders who stand up in the face of the storms. The Lord calls us to leadership, and so do the victims of the culture of death.

We are called to stand up—right now, we must be committed to carrying the healing mercy of Jesus Christ to this world. And the fight is not easy. We will not likely fight on a battlefield, in a glamorous blaze of glory. Instead we fight by claiming our nation for Christ, by forming Catholic culture that welcomes others to real freedom, by speaking—heart to heart—with those who are in need of Christ’s healing. We fight evil by praying, and hoping, to win every heart, every soul, every life, for Jesus Christ; as missionaries and disciples of mercy.

We also fight evil on our knees. We fight evil through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We fight evil by invoking St. Michael the Archangel. We fight evil by consecrating our nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the fount of true mercy, and true peace.

All of us can read the signs of the times. We are living through a great trial and a great tragedy. Real people, about whom we care very much, are gravely harmed by the infiltration of evil in our world. We know that Christ will be victorious in the end. But we also know how urgently Christ is needed in this world. Only we can entrust this nation to Jesus Christ—especially his Sacred Heart—in our prayers. And only we can choose, in response to the urgency of the moment, to be active, joyful, faithful missionaries of Jesus Christ—declaring the Gospel, and inviting the world to mercy.

We live in a grave and serious time in history. But now is time for healing, not for lamenting.

