



21 December 2017
Thursday of the 3rd Week of Advent

**A Pastoral Letter from Presiding Bishop George R. Lucey, FCM,
on Gender Identity**

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

In mid-Advent, a season in which the faithful joyfully anticipate the birth of the Christ-child, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) released a letter praising “natural marriage”—that is, union between one man and one woman—and condemning transgender identity on the grounds that “human beings are male or female and that the socio-cultural reality of gender cannot be separated from one’s sex as male or female.” To presume otherwise, the letter states, “goes against reason” and is “deeply troubling.”

The letter was co-signed by several representatives of non-Roman Catholic jurisdictions.

To its credit, the letter urged that Christians treat transgender persons “with compassion, mercy and honesty.” But its insistence that “gender ideology” is a morally unworthy falsehood undercuts this counsel. To use the bishops’ own language, the letter’s message goes against reason and is deeply troubling.

There is a wealth of biological and psychological research, which affirms that “one’s sex as male or female” in fact is not always compatible with gender identity, and that gender dysphoria is a genuine medical condition. We agree with the bishops that God created all humans with gender identity; but gender identity, we now know, may differ from sexual identity. Contrary to the bishops’ claim, there is no rational basis for assuming that an acknowledgement of this calls God’s design into question.

Moreover, the letter is deeply troubling from a pastoral, spiritual, and moral perspective, implying as it does that transgender persons are at best confused and at worst immoral. Especially disturbing is the letter’s insistence that children who express a gender identity different from their sexual one are harmed if taken seriously by their parents and physicians. Caution is certainly appropriate in such cases, but not the blanket rejection urged by the bishops.

Throughout the centuries, the world has witnessed the tragic consequences that occur when the Church refuses to recognize the rich diversity of God’s creation. In too many cases, entire groups of innocent people have been marginalized and even persecuted

because they failed to conform to what the Church defined as normative or pleasing in the eyes of God.

Acknowledging this is not a denial that there are types of behavior, which are genuinely sinful. But new scientific and psychological discoveries about human sexuality and gender reveal that transgender identification is not one of them.

In the Vatican-II document on religious freedom entitled *Dignitatis humanae*, the Council fathers recognized that “a sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary persons.” They affirmed that the Church should encourage humans to “act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom” in “the quest for the values proper to the human spirit.”

The American National Catholic Church takes this affirmation seriously. Our human and all-too-finite understanding of God’s will remains a work in progress. Although there is much in the Deposit of Faith that is certain and constant, our search for “values proper to the human spirit” continues. This isn’t an endorsement of a laissez-faire “anything goes” attitude when it comes to morality. Rather, it’s a humble and receptive openness to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, and a desire to enter ever more deeply into the loving-kindness taught and exemplified by the Prince of Peace whose Nativity we will shortly celebrate.

Signed on this Thursday of the 3rd Week of Advent.

*O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae et sol iustitiae:
veni, et illumine sedentes in tenebris
et umbra mortis*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "George R. Lucey, FCM". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend George R. Lucey, FCM
Presiding Bishop