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Canadian cardinal talks gay-straight alliances in schools

Isabella R. Moyer | May. 31, 2012 NCR Today

A public debate [1] on religious freedom is taking place in Ontario, Canada, between the provincial government and the Roman Catholic Church. The focus of the debate is Bill 13, Accepting Schools Act, 2012 [2], proposed by the ruling Liberal government. At issue is the requirement for all schools to allow students to form "gay-straight alliance" clubs, freely naming them as GSA.

Cardinal Thomas Collins, archbishop of Toronto and president of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, stresses that Catholic schools have "a rich array of spiritual resources, and methods developed out of our faith tradition, which not only fight bullying, but shape a school environment that is welcoming to all." He describes his specific concerns of Bill 13 in a May 28 letter [3].

> A "Gay-Straight Alliance" is a particular method of addressing one form of bullying, and providing personal support. The GSA model was developed in the United States in the 1980's. Because this model is so closely related to a movement with particular views concerning the human person and the issues of life, people who disagree with those views are understandably concerned that the model can serve as a means not only to address bullying, but to promote the views with which they disagree.

The cardinal concludes his letter with, ?There is no reason for this controversy. We all want schools that are loving and welcoming places for everyone. We simply ask that diversity be respected in our society, and that we be able to attain the common goal of welcoming schools, and of personal support for students, using methods that are in harmony with the faith we cherish.?

The good cardinal might not understand the reason for the controversy, but it leaves many scratching their heads. Most folks won?t read the cardinal?s letter in its entirety or understand the nuances of his reasoning. What the public sees is the church taking on yet another questionable confrontation in the name of religious freedom and yet another anti-gay stand.

Young LGBT persons see church leaders telling them that it?s OK to support each other against bullying, but they must remain silent about their identity.

Yes, bullying of all kinds must be addressed. We all agree on this. But saying that we shouldn?t focus specifically on the bullying of young LGBT persons or that GSA clubs should not be allowed in Catholic schools is perceived by many as yet another example of how far our church has to go to be a truly loving, welcoming and inclusive community.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/29/2015 - 13:10*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/canadian-cardinal-talks-gay-straight-alliances-schools

Links:
[1] http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/story/2012/05/29/f-ont-gay-straight-alliances.html
[2] http://ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=2549

[3] http://www.archtoronto.org/pdf/statementantibullyingmay2812.pdf