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Tepid reply from Rome to Hamburg bishop's 'diversity' guidelines for Catholic schools

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A tentative response has broken the Holy See's silence on the protest by parents in Hamburg against the archdiocese's imposition of guidelines for the sex education of minors in Catholic schools. The parents (many of whom are children of migrants in

Germany) claim that these guidelines are based on a document from the German Bishops' Conference arising from the Synodal Path. They argue that the document ' promotes the deliberate sexualisation of children and young people, devalues, distorts or rejects the Catholic view of sexuality, marriage and the family, and actively propagates ideological content relating to sexuality and sexual identity'.

In short, this is yet another 'mess made in Germany' that a militant bishop is trying to impose from above without caring about families' views. So much for synodality. Monsignor Stefan Hesse, the archbishop whom the Vatican has acknowledged had " organisational shortcomings" and committed "procedural errors" when handling abuse case files as head of personnel in the Archdiocese of Cologne, has come up against the determination of many parents, particularly a Peruvian mother named Varinia Arauco. She wrote to everyone – from the Pope downwards – to denounce the situation. Although the audience that a delegation from the Parents' Network for Child Protection and Prevention (the name chosen by the group of families) had requested from Pope Leo was not granted, they did receive a letter from the Dicastery for Culture and Education in Rome.

Ms Arauco had also written to the Prefect, José Tolentino de Mendonça, amongst many others, but it was the German Undersecretary, Monsignor Matthias Ambros, who replied. It was just a short note acknowledging the complaint and stating that the Dicastery "confirms that, regarding any guidelines for sex education, the position set out in the document *Male and Female He Created Them*: *Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender in Education* remains unchanged". This text, signed in 2019 by the then Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi, unequivocally rejects the approach set out in the German Bishops' Conference document on the 'recognition of the diversity of sexual identities in schools' and the guidelines inspired by it, which Monsignor Hesse would like to impose on Catholic schools in Hamburg.

According to the dicastery, 'education in affectivity requires appropriate and measured language' and 'must take into account that children and young people have not yet reached full maturity and are setting out to discover life with curiosity'.

Therefore, Versaldi wrote, it is necessary to help pupils develop 'a critical sense in the face of an onslaught of messages, unchecked pornography and an overload of stimuli that can distort sexuality'. This is a guide to countering the 'barrage of ambiguous and vague messages' with which the Archdiocese of Hamburg's conceptual framework for sex education is riddled.

Paradoxically, the document defends 'the legitimate aspiration of Catholic schools to uphold their own vision of human sexuality, in accordance with the freedom of families to base their children's education on an integral anthropology capable of harmonising all the dimensions that constitute their physical, psychological, and spiritual identity', while also noting that 'a democratic state cannot reduce the educational offering to a single way of thinking, especially on such a sensitive subject touching upon the fundamental understanding of human nature, and the natural right of parents to freely choose their children's education, in accordance with the dignity of the human person'. In Hamburg, however, it is not the civil authority imposing a pro-gender sex education programme on Catholic schools, but the ecclesiastical authority doing so against hundreds of parents' consent.

The guidelines issued by the German diocese reveal the 'anthropological disorientation' that characterises our cultural climate (and which has certainly contributed to the breakdown of the family by erasing the differences between men and women and regarding them as mere effects of historical and cultural conditioning). The guidelines are therefore in open violation of the content of Versaldi’s document, to which the Dicastery for Culture and Education still refers today on this subject. The former Congregation is aware of this, as evidenced by its reference to that text when replying to the mother from Hamburg.

Nevertheless, the Holy See cannot claim to have done its duty by sending just a few lines to the Parents' Network, implicitly acknowledging that they are in the right. Urgent action is needed to halt the implementation of the guidelines in the archdiocese's schools. Time is running out: the guidelines will come into effect on 20 August.