

Last week I made the announcement before mass that we'll be gathering signatures to put R-90 on the ballot this fall. That is the referendum calling for a public vote on the bill passed by the legislature last month mandating a comprehensive sex education curriculum across the state. Afterwards I was speaking with a parishioner and he wanted to know what that was all about. He hadn't followed the issue closely, but he made a couple of comments that struck me – because I suspect many others feel the same way. To paraphrase he said, “Is the Church against Sex Education?” and “Why is the Church always involved in these losing battles?” I thought they were powerful questions.

This is Good Shepherd Sunday. I was planning on preaching a homily about what it means to be a member of Jesus' flock – how this social distancing is making us appreciate the importance of community, etc. But, while the coronavirus is consuming (I seem to preach about it all the time), it's not all-consuming. There are other things going on in the world as well. Therefore, I changed my plans. It being Good

Shepherd Sunday reminded me that I, too, am a shepherd, and if I'm to be a good shepherd I need to speak out about any dangers the flock faces. Therefore, I want to address these two questions today.

Is the Catholic Church against sex education? No. In fact, we teach sex education at our parish school. But I think it's important to point out that this bill and controversy are not about teaching kids the biological facts of human reproduction. The Church has no problem with that. It's already happening – not to mention that if any of our kids want that information, it's only a couple clicks away on Wikipedia. It's not the fact of sex education that's the problem, but the content of the program and the lack of local input into that content.

This is about indoctrination. And I want to be clear that I use that term "Indoctrination" in a morally neutral way. Every society indoctrinates its children in its beliefs, morals, vision of the world. Every society has its own ideology that is passed down to the next generation. And these ideologies are usually exclusive and enforced by the

dominant cultural force in the society. In Saudi Arabia, the kids are indoctrinated in Moslem principles. In China children are taught the world view of the Communist Party. In early modern Italy and Spain, the only world view taught was Catholicism, and in England at the same time Protestant Christianity was the morality taught to English children. In America before the mid-20th century public education was still basically Protestant education. It was only when Protestantism lost its cultural dominance that public education became functionally secular. And that is where we are today.

The dominant cultural force in America today is secularism. And this bill is an effort to strengthen the secular indoctrination of American children. The give-away that the bill is about indoctrination rather than human biology is that it begins in Kindergarten. There is no need to teach kindergarteners about sex. They don't care and can't really grasp it. But it does make sense to teach them the social doctrine and ideology of the culture. We're never too young for that.

The ideology behind the bill is what the Pope and others have termed “gender ideology.” This ideology is at the core of the secular elite’s world view and value system, the principles they can never compromise on. This ideology teaches that individuals have the ability and right to do anything, and become anyone and anything they wish, as long as they don’t obstruct others from the same freedom. This freedom forbids condemning any sexual act between consenting adults, requires free access to abortion, defines marriage as individuals wish, makes one’s own gender a matter of personal choice, etc.

To ensure the dominance of this ideology, and that all public-school students will grow up assuming this ideology is true from the age of kindergarten on, is the purpose behind the sex education bill, and why the Catholic Church opposes it. The bill also denies local communities the power to create curricula suited to their own beliefs, thereby violating the social justice doctrine of subsidiarity. But at the

heart of Catholic opposition is gender ideology's fundamental errors about the nature of the human person and reality itself.

The Catholic school system arose in response to the Protestant nature of public schools in the 19th century. Why not just abandon the public schools if Catholics don't agree with the teaching in them and attend their own schools or homeschool? Well, some do. But that leads into the second question: "Why does the Catholic Church get involved in these losing battles?"

I assume that this parishioner was talking about recent political battles over same-sex marriage, abortion, physician-assisted suicide, etc. (Note: these battles were also fought over the secular culture's core principle.) And, yes, the Catholic Church was on the losing side. So, it's a good question: why fight these losing battles?

First, I don't know the future. I don't we will lose the fight. But even if we do, I do know that the truth about the human person is worth fighting for, regardless of the outcome. But there's also the

consideration of protecting Catholic schools themselves as long as possible. If this battle in the public schools is lost, the next battle will be for the right of Catholic schools to continue teaching what the secular culture believes are various bigotries that seriously harms people. What has begun in the public schools won't stay there. It's important that those opposed to our teaching about the human person and human sexuality know we care enough to fight for it.

Perhaps you're thinking, in the midst of this horrible plague is the Church really going on about sex again? Well, we didn't bring it up. I too wish the legislature hadn't passed this bill during the coronavirus pandemic. But they did. Which means 129,000 signatures must be gathered by June to put R-90 on the ballot, so time is short. But, at least, it's a reminder for us in this crazy time that there are all kinds of crises in the world today. The coronavirus is a health care and economic disaster. But our world is also experiencing spiritual crises. And Catholics are called to engage in them all.

The sheep of Jesus' flock hear His voice. What is His voice saying today? Well, on this issue it's pretty clear. Pope Francis has often warned us about gender ideology and its dangers. Our local Apostolic Shepherd, Archbishop Etienne, has approved this gathering of signatures for R-90. This is not my pet project or personal obsession. This call is coming from The Good Shepherd's own shepherds.

That is why we're gathering signatures for R-90 on our campus. If you wish to sign there will be a tent on our plaza with proper social distancing where you can do that Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 9:30 – 12:00 and then from 6:00 – 7:00; and on Saturday from 12:00 noon until 3:00 PM.