

SEPT 2002

Welcome to a new academic year. Once again we bring you this extra service from *The Interim*, Canada's life and family newspaper. We explore public issues within a faith-based perspective, shedding light on topics either ignored or given short shrift by the regular media.

This month we tackle the institution of marriage (through the editorial of Paul Tuns) and one type of schooling which youngsters could experience (a feature article by Stephen Tardif making a case for single gender schooling).

THEME ONE

Importance of marriage

Marriage has existed from time immemorial as a religious entity recognized by the state, but now, the government has encroached upon the church and her rights. The reason the state cares – or at least should care – about the existence and health of the family is that civilization itself rests on this institution. It is through families, led by a married man and woman, that the next generation is brought into the world, raised and educated. Its architecture is divine and its purpose is sanctifying.

U.S. researchers Sarah McLanahan and Gary Sandfeur, in their 1994 book, *Growing Up with a Single Parent*, noted the terrible consequences suffered by children in disrupted families. [They] find that the source of disruption, whether resulting from out-of-wedlock births or divorce, is irrelevant. Children thrive when they have a mother and a father joined in the sight of God. Marriage binds parents together more profoundly and permanently than any other union, co-habitation or otherwise. The importance of marriage is implicitly recognized by the fact the government does not allow its dissolution recklessly. The state must give its imprimatur to a marriage's dissolution through divorce, even if it does so too casually, too often.

The government (and society), however, have been increasingly seeing marriage as merely the formal recognition of a loving relationship. This has reduced marriage to a private rite. In fact, marriage confers upon couples special rights and responsibilities, both of which serve society. It also confers special rights and responsibilities upon each partner within the relationship.

To extend marriage rights to same-sex couples is an explicit approval of the homosexual lifestyle. The question that must be answered is: what benefit is there for society? The answer: none. Such an accommodation diminishes marriage and the family by relegating them to the purely private functions of personal self-fulfillment. The institution of marriage would then be turned from something wonderful in which two people share their lives together and bring children into this world - a gift to the couple and society - to something that is

entirely greed-based.

[Jonathan] Rauch argued in a recent article in *The Atlantic Monthly* that marriage would do for homosexual men what it does for heterosexual men; namely, tame or domesticate them. Noting that the homosexual is notoriously promiscuous, Rauch said that marriage would tame the impulse to have multiple sexual partners because he will be in a relationship that binds him more closely to his partner.

Rauch's cute but flawed plea for same-sex marriage ignores too many issues, including the fact that homosexuals cannot have their own children and that it is offspring that civilize men and bind couples the most; that there might be something inherently different in the nature of opposite-sex and same-sex relationships; that once marriage is extended to same-sex partners, there is little reason to deny it to any other sexual arrangement, such as polygamy, pedophilia and bestiality.

The issue of the definition of marriage, if it is to be debated, must be debated by parliamentarians, and not by a handful of legal elites before an even smaller handful of unelected judges, and it must face the facts about what marriage is and is not. Marriage is the best way to bring into being the next generation. It is not the state-sanctioned approval of a personal relationship.

Over the course of the last half-century, society's view of marriage has changed markedly. Marriage is clearly under assault. Since the 1960s, divorce, co-habitation and illegitimacy rates have all sky-rocketed. However, instability in the family is hardly a reason to encourage further damage to the institution. Indeed, such instability cries out for further protection of marriage and the upholding of it as the ideal.

Canada needs to strengthen the family. To do that, it must revitalize marriage. Marriage will be revitalized only when laws and customs favour marriage over all other ways of union.

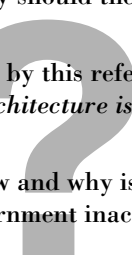
It is time for pro-family Canadians to make the case for the traditional definition of marriage.

What God has instituted, let no state tear asunder.

Paul Tuns, Editorial of the Sept. edition of *The Interim*, page 4

Questions

1. According to Tuns why should the state care about the institution of marriage?
2. What does Tuns mean by this reference to the nature of the human family: *Its architecture is divine and its purpose is sanctifying*?
3. According to Tuns how and why is marriage in danger of being trivialized by government inaction or court redefinition?



4. Summarize Tuns' arguments in favor of the traditional view of marriage. Is his viewpoint correct?

For additional research, discussion, debate.

5. Compare and contrast marriage laws in a previous historical era (e.g. Ancient Greece or Rome, Elizabethan England, or 18th century Russia) with those of contemporary Canada.

6. What major social, intellectual and economic factors have contributed to today's changing views toward marriage?

7. Is marriage of divine origin or is it a social construct of convenience? What difference does the view adopted make in the current debate in Canada?

8. "A careful study of history shows that societies with weak family structures ultimately disintegrate". If this be true, what hope is there for modern Western civilization?

9. Should unelected (or otherwise) judges be entrusted with the power to redefine basic institutions like marriage?

10. "The present crisis in Canada is the inevitable outcome of judicial activism run amok." Do you agree with this comment? Why or why not?



THEME TWO

Separate and equal: The case for single-gender education

The objection to single-gender schools is a symptom of the cult of equality, which pervades the philosophy of education today... The argument for single-gender schools proceeds, not from a hopeful vision of what might be, but from an astute

observation of what is. The separation of genders in education is necessary, because instructors will, consciously or unconsciously, tailor their teaching methods to either boys or girls. Teaching methods cannot really be directed half to boys, half to girls; they will become all one thing, or all the other. And no compromise will suit both boys and girls.

This is because the differences between male and female are not imagined or invented societal conventions, but scientifically proven, incontrovertible facts. The differences are physiological, psychological, intellectual, and emotional.

Dr. West, a professor at the University of Sydney, has authored a book on this subject called, *What is the Matter with Boys*. In addressing the question, he notes that girls are best suited for the current brand of academic success. After all, long periods of silence and attentiveness – attributes appreciated by teachers – are not traits common to young boys. "Is it any wonder the ideal student has become, by default, female?" Thus, as the education system panders more and more to female virtues, boys are marginalized. Their normal, boisterous and rambunctious behaviour becomes characterized as disruptive and troublesome. Convinced that the ideal student should be docile and quiet, teachers become increasingly unable to handle normal male exuberance. Recent studies show boys are being diagnosed with attention deficit difficulties at five times the rate of girls. While some of these cases may be legitimate, one wonders whether many of them are the result of the misdiagnosis of boyish energy by teachers who cannot handle it. After all, boys will be boys: albeit disenfranchised, drugged and educationally debilitated by a feminist perspective.

.... Since teaching methods will, inevitably, be biased towards one gender or the other, it makes most sense to let boys and girls flourish in their respective environments, rather than to penalize one gender in an unfriendly system.

Proponents of co-education claim that equality of gender in the schoolhouse will ensure equality of gender in the workplace. But it is just this sought-after equality that makes single-gender education more imperative: if men and women are to truly be equals in adult life, they require time to mature and develop in optimal circumstances at their own pace in childhood, while still learning how to learn.

The purpose of going to school is to be educated. However, in a school setting where both sexes are present, too often in the teenage years, learning takes a secondary role to dating and other forms of socializing. This shift in interest is only natural, but it seems prudent to separate the sexes during the school hours to reduce their distraction. Rather than estrange the sexes, it prompts greater social activity.

According to studies, boys in single-gender schools are significantly more likely to ask girls out on dates. Furthermore, this separation tends to reduce teen pregnancy. In an all-girls school in a low-income area of Harlem, the incident of teen pregnancy among students of a local girl school are eight times lower than the area's average.

....But more than eliminating distractions, single-gender schools provide an understanding of gender that can only be attained in a separated environment. In a co-educational set-

ting, it is not enough for students to be themselves, masculine or feminine: boys and girls must be perceived as such as well..... in single-gender education, boys are more forthcoming in expressing their interest in the arts, and [why] girls in single-gender schools are, according to the National Coalition of Girl Schools, six times more likely to pursue studies in science and technology. In a co-educational environment, interests are either feigned or stifled so that boys and girls are perceived as they think they ought to be perceived. Ironically, stereotypes are reinforced in the co-education milieu, and understanding of gender will either be a gross exaggeration or a marked departure of the norm. In the case of boys, they will either be boorish or effeminate, because they will either conform to a more feminine model of behaviour, or reject this behaviour all together. To return to Dr. West: "They no longer know what it means to be a man. They don't know what it means to be a boy."

Stephen Tardif graduated this spring from St. Michael's College School in Toronto and is studying literature and philosophy at the University of Toronto.

Questions

1. How convincing a case does Tardif make for single gender schooling? Is it necessary, as he claims, or merely ideal?
2. What leads Dr. Peter West to exclaim rhetorically: "Is it any wonder the ideal student has become, by default, female?"
3. Do you agree with West's insight?
4. Identify the real distinct advantages of single gender schooling according to Tardif.
5. If the premises of Tardif have merit, what changes should be considered for co-educational schooling?
6. Is it economics that dictate the organization of schools into coeducational structures?

Other Views

A) "In the United States, enrollments at single-sex schools are soaring, and even coed schools, public and private, are setting up all-girl and all-boy classes in math and science. There is a growing recognition of gender differences in learning styles. As early as first grade, girls approach arithmetic problems in different ways from boys. In middle and high school, girls' math smarts (and scores) improve when they get frequent feedback, engage in collaborative group work, and learn connections between abstract concepts and practical applications.

Issues of gender inequity in education may go beyond teaching approaches. As researches have documented, social dynamics are different in same-sex and mixed-sex classrooms. In elementary grades, boys are more active and assertive. They shout out an answer—any answer—before the teacher has finished a question; girls wait until they're sure they know the right response. And even teachers with gender-equity training report that they still devote more attention to the high-spirited hijinks of boys than to the quieter academic dif-

ficulties of girls.

Small classes and caring teachers may make a bigger difference, but it is also true that at least some girls speak up more and perform better without the distractions and disruptions boys can bring, especially in challenging subjects like math."

<http://www.dsha.k12.wi.us/single.htm>

B) Boys and girls thrive on a good education, regardless of whether the school is single-sex or coeducational. "There is no evidence in general that single-sex education works or is better for girls than coeducation.... When elements of a good education are present, girls and boys succeed. Elements include small classes and schools, equitable teaching practices, and focused academic curriculum.

Boys' reading and writing problems often go unnoticed [in coed schools]. "One study found a correlation between boys' low reading skills and their association of reading with feminine skills," said Pollack.

People often handle boys' emotional and social needs inappropriately or inadequately. "When we observe boys' emotional worlds more closely, we discover much quiet suffering under their outward bravado."

Educators tend to interpret "boy behavior" as a discipline problem without probing to discover emotional needs. "Boys generally prefer to learn by doing, by engaging in some action-oriented task. In learning environments biased against their strengths, boys may become frustrated and attempt to get their needs met by seeking negative attention."

Teaching methods fail to take into account boys' unique learning styles. "Many classes simply aren't conducted in a way boys, with their naturally high energy levels, find captivating. When boys aren't engaged, they become discipline problems," Pollack concluded.

http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr215.shtml

C) Though much research is focused on the benefits of "all girls" schools, educators are finding that boys, too, can benefit significantly from single-gender education.....Adolescent girls and boys learn quite differently. Boys tend to do better in math and science, yet lag behind in reading and writing. They generally develop more quickly in kinesthetic skills, but are less advanced in language skills. They also tend to be more competitive and aggressive in the classroom.

What is often overlooked is that boys are more likely to have problems in school than girls. Boys represent 71 percent of school suspensions and two-thirds of special education classes. Boys are also 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder.

Research found that boys at single-gender schools had higher self-esteem and better study skills than boys in coed settings. Moreover, the study showed that boys in single-sex schools had fewer negative attitudes about women than their peers in a coed environment.

<http://www.thelimitiacocompany.com/news/presskits/SaintLouis/10.gender.htm>

D) One of the newest and largest studies on the subject

looked at six years of test-score data for 270,000 Australian students. The authors adjusted the data to account for differences at the outset in students' abilities or in the type of schools they attended – in other words, whether the schools were religious, private, or public. The researchers then found that boys and girls in single-sex schools scored, on average, 15 to 22 percentile points higher than peers in coeducational settings.

Ken J. Rowe, who led the project for the Australian Council for Educational Research, said those gains “pale into insignificance,” however, compared with the gains that students make from having skilled teachers – regardless of their classmates' gender.

www.singlesexschools.org

E) What happened in California? Didn't they try single-sex public schools there? Didn't that 'experiment' show that single-sex public education won't work?

The Los Angeles Times reported that students for the single-sex schools were “drawn from the alternative and correctional education system. Many have spent time in juvenile detention centers, fallen behind in mainstream schools or encountered personal troubles at home. Without help, most are in jeopardy of not graduating.”...This finding was echoed in the Datnow report...[it] made it clear that the California program was profoundly flawed from the outset, and could not be used as a meaningful indicator of the success or failure of single-sex education in public schools.

...[in] a blistering review by Christina Hoff Sommers entitled “Give same-sex schooling a chance,” published in Education Week, September 26 2001, pp. 36ff. Sommers noted that the Datnow report “never [states] whether single-sex schools improved grades, test scores, or attendance.” According to Sommers, “anecdotal evidence suggests” that student performance did improve in the single-sex schools. Sommers' principle criticism of the Datnow report is that it focussed narrowly on the question of how single-sex education affected the students' views on gender, rather than examining how single-sex education affected the students' academic performance.

www.alumni.ucsd.edu

F) While proponents of single-sex schools argue that children learn better without the distractions of the opposite sex, you have to wonder what world they are training their children to live in. Men and women are rarely separated in our society, unless they are using a bathroom, changing for sports or, in some instances, worshipping. By postponing interaction with the opposite sex, won't children at once demonize and fantasize about the gender they are segregated from? How smooth would the transition from single-sex high school to mixed gender college complete with co-ed dorm be? And what about the workplace? Would a doctor walk into an operating room and say, “My God. How can I be expected to perform surgery under these distracting circumstances? The anesthesiologist is a man!”

Although some studies have identified positive results from single-sex schools, it is difficult to prove that it is a school's

segregated admissions policy and not some other aspect that is responsible for the benefits....Problems common in co-educational schools such as harassment and stereotyping do not necessarily disappear in single-sex schools....The Datnow study found that single-sex schools often not only avoided challenging established notions of gender but reinforced stereotypes. Jane Weinkrantz

http://members.aol.com/pobct/same_sex_education.html

Questions

1. Do boys and girls have different learning styles? How and why?
2. What are the consequences when teachers do not appreciate these differences?
3. How do boys and girls differ in their development as seen in their academic interests?
4. What claims are made on behalf of single gender schools in addressing these developmental differences?
5. Based on these six readings compare and contrast the purported advantages and disadvantages of co-educational schooling versus single gender schooling.
6. Are some subjects better studied in one setting rather than the other?
7. If any group is shortchanged in the coeducational classroom, is it the boys or the girls?
8. According to critics, what other factors besides gender can account for the differences between academic scores attained by boys and girls?
9. Might a gender segregated education be more appropriate for some age groups than for others?
10. How are gender stereotypes reinforced in schools?
11. Before the onset of mass education boys and girls were taught separately in Western nations. What brought about the changes to co-educational schooling?
12. In Ontario and other jurisdictions females now surpass males in their academic achievements in most subjects right up to university.
 - a. Is this a problem for society?
 - b. What might account for this superiority of female student performance?
 - c. What can be done to ensure equal opportunities for both genders in today's schools?

