

April, 2004

In this edition of the curriculum supplement we provide updates on several themes that have been previously discussed, but in different contexts: same-sex unions and marriage; religious liberty and secularization. We also summarize the contents of a few interesting, thought-provoking essays found in leading journals.

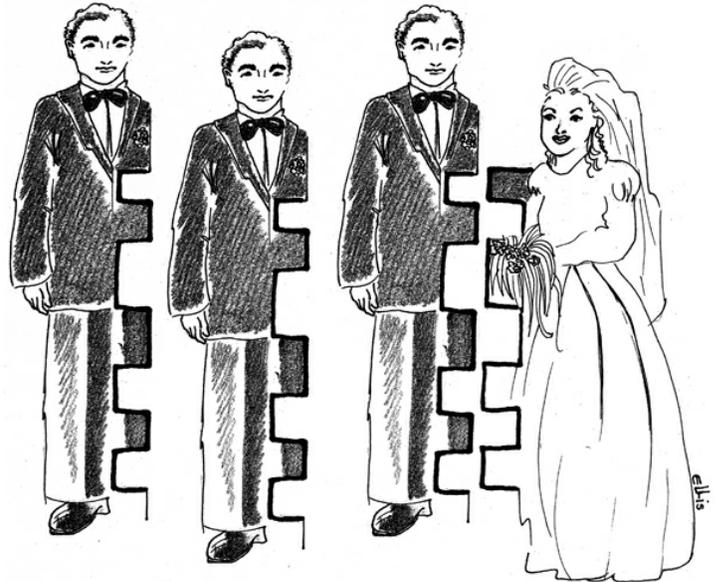
The Continuing Debate on Marriage.

In the April edition of *The Interim* several articles touch upon this important issue. The articles contain information and views that should be treated with appropriate sensitivity.

In the first of these articles, “*What Science tells us of same-sex unions*”, (on pages 1 and 6) Donald De Marco presents information about same-sex unions that is derived from the scientific evidence accumulated in the field of immunology, but which is never dealt with in any mainstream writing on the subject. Senior level students could be assigned the complete article as a reading on the topic of same-sex unions. It could serve as a background for discussions in a religion, family studies, law course or other relevant high school course. The following questions could guide the students in grappling with the topic and its general implications for society.

Questions/Activities

1. What are the chief medical fears that De Marco associates with same-sex unions?
2. What does he mean when he says that: “*Nature, we might add, demands respect. It does not make accommodations to politically based ideologies or individual preferences*”?
3. “*In looking closely at what the science of immunology can tell us, we have even more reason for upholding and honouring the wisdom of marriage as a union of one man and one woman.*” Is this a valid conclusion based on the evidence presented?
4. On page 4 of the same edition of *The Interim* one finds a cartoon on the same topic. What point is the cartoonist making?
5. Does the cartoon reinforce the argument of Donald De Marco? How or why not?



The Family: Discovering the Obvious

Mary Eberstadt *First Things*, February, 2004.

Another component of the debate on the nature of marriage and the fate of the traditional family is highlighted in the following article that appeared in the February edition of *First Things* magazine.

In this essay on the family, writer Mary Eberstadt claims that only two decades ago among leading secular thinkers it was chic or the in-thing to argue in favour of the non-traditional family, defending the various experiments going on (easy divorce, co-habiting, swinging, etc.) as both acceptable and even to be welcomed. But today the tide has shifted, and she goes on to explain why.

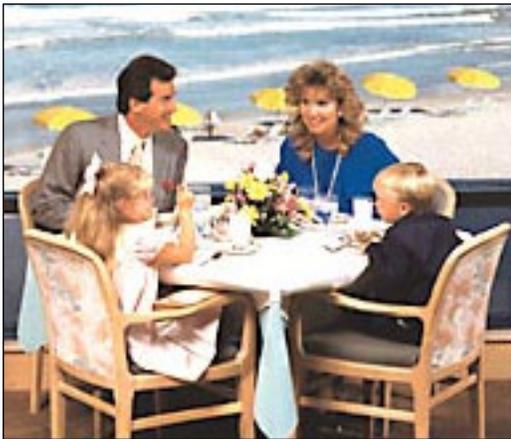
According to Eberstadt there is considerable evidence pointing to undeniable negative consequences for society caused by the lifestyle choices associated with the nontraditional family. The researchers recognize that everything is not hunkey-dorey with non-traditional heterosexual marriage and family arrangements.

Then Eberstadt focuses on the current social fad for accepting/welcoming homosexual anti-traditional households. How does one explain the power and strength of the gay drive for marriage status? Eberstadt quotes an insightful comment by Patrick Fagan:

“*If one no longer considers childbearing part of the nature of the sexual act, and if married heterosexuals claim childless sex as a ‘right’, then it is difficult to deny this ‘right’ to those whose sexual acts always preclude children.*”

She concludes that despite the celebration of gay rights, the reality of “facts” render the lifestyle sad and dangerous to the individual and to society at large from the point of view of health. The facts produced by the most secular of sources – namely, social science, medical science, psychological studies, demonstrate that same-sex unions and family arrangements cannot be defended as “virtually normal”. These studies and reports, although ignored by the secular world, show that gay people suffer from chemical addiction and mental disorders known as “depression” in disproportionate numbers compared to the rest of society. Suicide is also far more likely among the gay population than among the rest of the people (for example one study showed that 18 % of gay men reported at least one suicide attempt as opposed to 3% among heterosexual males). Another troubling statistic is that gay men are significantly more likely than non-gay men to have been sexually abused or exploited as children and adolescents.

Based on this type of evidence Eberstadt questions the wisdom of extending marriage status to relationships fraught with so many negative baggage. She asks, if being gay is so great and so normal, what accounts for all these unfortunate results of that lifestyle? If society is more open minded and more tolerant and accepting of that lifestyle as never before, why do so many gay people suffer these pains? She concludes that the empirical evidence of gay life contradicts the rhetoric of “virtual normality” and therefore, the present euphoria for non-traditional same-sex marriage and family will dissipate even among the secular pundits. The same hard reality will set in about the genuine problems posed by such nontraditional relationships, and the children to be found in such households.



Questions/Activities

1. What connection is there between the two forms of nontraditional marriages and households according to Eberstadt?
2. Why are such findings as cited by Eberstadt ignored in discussions about gay rights?
3. Have students research the latest studies published on these issues.
4. What connection is there between the material presented by De Marco in his article in *The Interim* and the observations of Eberstadt?

What is the Ideological Intention of Same-Sex Unions?

Supporters of traditional marriage continue to warn that society runs a terrible risk by sympathizing with the cause of homosexual union.

A bioethics expert, Claudia Navarini, recently asserted that, what underlies the homosexual’s push for same-sex unions, is a desire to “destroy the family.” She described the intentions of homosexuals as “manifestly ideological: to weaken, split and finally eradicate the very meaning of marriage, by deforming it with simple simulations, and so destroy the family, the reality of which proclaims inexorably the radical truth about man.”

To recognize homosexual unions legally or to compare them to marriage would be blurring “the fundamental values that belong to the common heritage of humanity.”

Navarini draws a contrast between such unions (seen as contrary to nature and human dignity and to the institutions of society, such as the family and marriage) and true marital unions that are natural, “a fact of nature that arises from the honest investigation of the human reality, valid for all human beings.... The exercise of sexuality has a biological basis, expressed in the physical and complementary differences between man and woman, who consent to the sexual act and, consequently, to procreation ...furthermore, the complementary differences include dimensions of psychological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual structure.”

Navarini, in her talk with ZENIT, made reference to the American College of Pediatricians position paper, *Homosexual Parenting: Is It Time For Change?* The paper states: “The American College of Pediatricians believes it is inappropriate, potentially hazardous to children, and dangerously irresponsible to change the age-old prohibition on homosexual parenting, whether by adoption, foster care, or by reproductive manipulation. This position is rooted in the best available science.”

Read the American College of Pediatricians report at: <http://www.acpeds.org/?CONTEXT=art&cat=22&art=50&BISKIT=2920801063>

Questions/Activities

1. What arguments does Navarini use to combat the notion of same-sex unions?
2. What is the prevailing concern of Navarini?
3. How do her concerns reinforce those of Donald De Marco and Mary Eberstadt?

Secularism Unbound: Can we continue to enjoy religious freedom?

Religion is closely related to issues of life and family. It affects people's way of thinking and their reactions to societal changes. The theme of religion and the public square is keenly debated in democratic states. All the hot social issues wending their way through the public legislative process draws tremendous interest, but, even in free societies, not all voices and opinions have an equal opportunity to be heard. There has been and there continues to be a strong, concerted effort on the part of "comprehensive" secularists to rid public life of what they perceive to be the "divisive" and "corrupting" influence of religion. This bias manifests itself in many ways and it is usually political expressed.

There are numerous examples and in different parts of the world: perennial court cases dealing with religious expression (prayer) in public schools; the deliberate avoidance of any reference to God or any prayer at public memorials to fallen soldiers; judicial decisions imposing restrictions on the free exercise of religion; legislative bodies outlawing the wearing of any exterior clothing/accessories depicting religious beliefs or values, (France's ban of the wearing of the *hajib* by Moslem students, "large" crosses by Christians, and *yarmulkas* by Jewish students); proposed "hate law" legislation that would add sexual orientation as a criterion for judging an act, speech, etc as "hateful" and therefore prohibited. (see "*Get ready for the knock on the door*" Tristan Emmauel, *The Interim*, March, 2004, page 19). There are many other more subtle efforts to muzzle religious expression or to relegate religious believers to the sidelines on public issues.

What accounts for this hostility towards religion in general and to Christianity in particular in modern societies? Can the religious believer who takes his faith seriously enjoy the free, full, and unfettered exercise of his civil rights?

Some of the more extreme secular journalists, intellectuals, and university professors consider religious liberty itself a 'pernicious idea'. According to these people, a society cannot be truly free if it gives organized religion and its adherents freedom to operate. Why? Because, according to these "seers", religion divides society through its claims to absolute truths and its answer(s) to the ultimate meaning of life. These exponents of militant secularism make many unsupported claims against religion that would seem to run counter to the actual facts and that also deny received wisdom:

- a) Religion is not beneficial to society
- b) Religious believers must not bring their beliefs to bear in the public square
- c) Society must discourage belief in ultimate truths
- d) Religious beliefs threaten civic peace
- e) Religion can be tolerated only so long as it is con-

sistent with the establishment of the secular moral order

f) *Bishops who threaten religious sanctions against dissident church members are guilty of threatening the rights of democratic citizens*

g) *Certain religious believers should be excluded from holding particular public offices , like serving as judges*

b) *Parents should not have the right to 'impose' their beliefs on their children*

i) *Religious education inculcates reactionary and repressive values in children, therefore the state is obligated to prohibit such schools and to closely monitor what parents themselves teach their children at home*

j) *It is the citizen's duty to accept the use of governmental authority to control religion*

Questions/Activities

1. What is meant by secularism/secularization of society?
2. How would one refute each of these statements?
3. Are these statements extreme? Why or why not?
4. Why should parents be considered the primary educators of their children? Why not the state? Can their respective interests be reconciled?
5. What does freedom of religion mean to you?
6. What should religious leaders do to members of their church who do not follow its teachings?
7. Are there any examples of Canadian secular liberalism in action?
8. List and discuss five legitimate benefits of a religious-based education.



The Wages of Secularism

In an essay reprinted in the April edition of *The Interim* (page 5), Mark Steyn, a noted journalist takes up a couple of these themes. He writes that the United

States is powerful and religious, while Canada and the European Community are weak and secular. Steyn suggests that religion can be a strong antidote to moral decadence, political decline, and the loss of nerve in defending truth, democracy, and civilization.

While exploring the differences between these nations Steyn makes several salient points and offers some provocative conclusions. He considers a number of episodes and uses his own anecdotal evidence to support his thesis that there exists a large cultural divide between Europe and America. The two societies are growing further and further apart because of these differing attitudes. This thesis is also shared by George Weigel in another essay below.

a) In the United States, the Mel Gibson movie, *The Passion of the Christ* has been well-received, drawing huge crowds, while in Europe the reviews have been more negative, often polarizing, and even condescending because as he puts it, Gibson “has had the bad taste to make a religious movie about a Jesus who isn’t an Episcopalian social worker with enlightened views on women, gay marriage and so forth.”(see reviews to be found in European publications as they appear on the following sites:

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/02/29/1077989432277.html?from=storyrhs>

http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr/international/feature_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000474770

The movie aroused passions in Europe, as it did in America — and nowhere more so than in France. In Spain leftist newspapers referred to it as “fascist propaganda”.....In Italy a recent op-ed, *la Repubblica*, Italy’s largest liberal newspaper, characterized Gibson as a “Taliban.”)

b) The differing responses to the movie make it one of “a select group of cultural markers that separate Europe from ‘Bush’s America’. Aside from his international policies, it is Bush’s religiosity that irks the elites of Europe. The latter cannot stomach or understand how a political leader in the modern world can pretend or, even worse, take seriously any religious belief or value. To these people Bush is a cowboy, unthinking and intellectually deprived.

c) America is the last religious nation in the Western world, that is, one where the majority of the population are practising believers and regular attenders of their church (or synagogue, or mosque). In Europe, the statistics show that the churches might as well close as places of worship. For example, St. Paul Cathedral in London is open only as a museum.

d) Updating G.K. Chesterton’s aphorism that when people cease to believe in God they will likely believe in anything, Steyn notes that most of the Western world’s non-believers believe in a government as the

trusted “purveyor of cradle-to-grave welfare [that] will provide daycare for your babies and take your aged parents off your hands”.

e) America is seen as the most religious nation in the West and it is also the most powerful militarily, economically and culturally. Steyn asks if that is a coincidence. He goes on to answer, possibly.....but then he asks what happens when a nation opts for the “post-Christian future”?

f) The answer to this last question can be seen in the sad fate of Quebec. He sees it as a doomed society, dying from the effects of its secular “Quiet Revolution”. He cites statistics to prove his point - extremely low birth rate that are insufficient to keep up its percentage within Canada let alone fulfilling the promise of the “revanche de la crèche” [revenge of the cradle].

g) Quebecers have, to their shame, embraced a culture of death. The signs are there staring one in the face: marriage and families are dying institutions in Quebec; the province has the highest rate of common-law relationships on the continent; Quebec has the highest rate of abortion in Canada.

h) Steyn notes that Europe and Quebec face a looming demographic disaster. They seem to have little interest in God’s first injunction to “go forth and multiply”.

i) In the face of these demographic facts and a culture of forgetfulness, it is the “hyper-rationalists” of secular Europe who are living on blind faith not the Christian fundamentalists of America.

Questions/Activities

1. Is Steyn projecting his own social concerns or is he correct in his analysis?
2. Assign students to do their own study of the Gibson movie’s reception by North American audiences. Where has the most virulent criticism come from? Who have been its strongest supporters?
3. Is America more religious than Europe? Is America more powerful than Europe? What indices could be used for such a comparison?
4. Are the statistics cited by Steyn reliable? Are they valid indicators of a society’s health and continued viability?
5. What does Steyn suggest is the real divider between Europe’s view of reality and that of the United States?

Children at Risk

W. Bradford Wilcox *First Things*, February 2004

Another article pertains to the nature of children, how they learn and how they integrate in their community. The article speaks to the American context, but much of what it reports is applicable to youth in other jurisdic-

tions, like Canada, as well. Have youth been losing ground in the past half-century in terms of mental health and positive social integration? If so, what would be the evidence? Suicide rates? Delinquency? Drug use? Teen pregnancies? Violent crime?

The rate of suicide is regarded as an important indicator of the lack of psychological well being among teens. It is also an excellent barometer of the overall health of the social life of a society. If young people are fully integrated into “authoritative communities” (religious institutions, intact families, and other civic institutions) they think that life is worth living. These communities “provide them with a sense of belonging and with moral and spiritual meaning that lends their lives purpose and hope. [Conversely] when adolescents have no ties, or only attenuated ties, to authoritative communities, they lose hope and become vulnerable to a range of social and psychological pathologies, including suicide”.

The problem, according to Wilcox, is that these authoritative communities have not done well in the past half-century. There is strong evidence that the secularization of life has helped fuel the downward spiral in the social and psychological well being of teens. The report, called *Hardwired to Connect* (put out by the American Commission on Children at Risk), nonetheless suggests that there is renewed reason for optimism when it comes to the well being of children. The rates of negative indices have slowed down in the past 10 years and have actually begun to reverse in the United States. Just as importantly, the report makes the case that the human person is “hardwired to connect to other people and to moral and spiritual meaning”. These secular writers and researchers are admitting that “human connections to family and to God are rooted not only in enduring social needs but also in the biological makeup of the human person”. The Commission concluded among other things that

experience puberty later than girls who live with unrelated adult males – whether a stepfather or the mother’s boyfriend.

Adolescents who do not feel strongly connected to God, and who do not enjoy a community of fellow believers, are much more likely to turn to alcohol, drugs, and deviance to fill the hole in their lives.

Surely, such studies strengthen the belief that religion, marriage, intact families, and civic participation by people contribute positively to the well being of society. This would appear to be common sense but one would never know this through reading the mainstream press, watching television, going to the movies, or listening to the latest hit songs.

Questions/Activities

1. What important points are raised in this article?
2. How is the well being of teens influenced by their connectedness to “authoritative communities”?
3. Are there implications in these findings for the proper organization of schools? What should school cultures reflect?
4. Why are these truths not reported in the mainstream press?

The Crisis of Civilization in Europe

Courses in world politics and modern civilization offer opportunities to ponder the flow and meaning of current events and their longer-term implications. Some observers write convincingly about the meaning of certain developments. George Weigel theorizes that Europe today has a grave problem, one that is best understood in moral and cultural terms. A dramatic way of demonstrating the nature of this problem is to compare Europe with the United States in their respective attitudes and responses to a number of issues.

He posits that there is a disparity of military power between Europe and the United States. This power gap in turn is the result of an ideological gap between the two. Their 20th century war experiences have led to different set of perceptions about the threats to peace in the new century. The Europeans are convinced that security threats can be met and contained by international legal and political instruments of conflict resolution. This reliance on “soft power” has resulted in a steady decline of Europe’s “hard power” capabilities. Weigel maintains that it is precisely America’s possession and actual use of hard power that has permitted Europe to place its faith in bureaucratic methods for peace building and peace-keeping.

Adolescent girls who live with their biological fathers



Weigel asks a series of questions that throw the situation into dramatic relief, for example:

Why do the Europeans perceive the world differently?

Why did so many Europeans fail to condemn communism as a failed moral and political monstrosity after its collapse in 1989?

Why is Europe retreating from democracy and binding itself ever tighter with the cords of bureaucracy?

Why do European courts seek an expanded international jurisdiction that defies the democratic decisions of free people in other countries?

Why have many of Europe's political leaders insisted that the new constitution for Europe include a deliberate act of historical amnesia, in which 1500 years of Christianity's contributions to the European understanding of human rights and democracy are airbrushed from the continent's political memory?

Why are so many European public intellectuals "Christophobic"?

Above all, and most urgently of all, why is Europe systematically depopulating itself? Why is Europe committing demographic suicide?

After looking at various insights offered by thinkers and historians like Christopher Dawson and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Weigel concludes that Europe in the 19th century lost its soul, its belief in God. Europe underwent a civilizational crisis inspired by a conversion to atheistic humanism on the part of the governing classes. The latter came to see belief in God as bondage. So they came up with an ideology and a program for remaking this world, wedding atheistic humanism to modern technology. Europe forgot God in the pursuit of a false concept of human freedom. Weigel says that "European man has convinced himself that in order to be modern and free, he must be radically secular." This is what is at the root of the civilizational crisis.

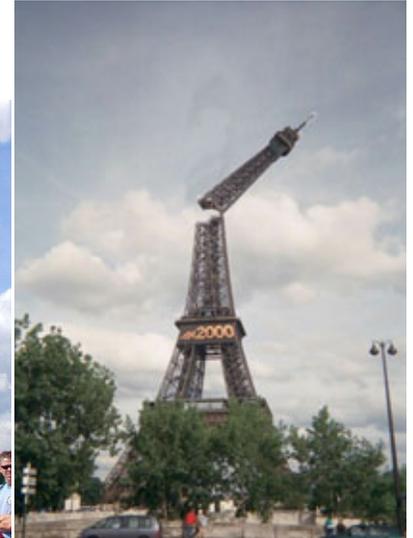
Weigel says that America should care deeply about this European problem. For one, the United States owes so much to its own roots in the European traditions, whether law, religion, constitutional government. Secondly, Europe's demographic meltdown poses a medium and long-term threat to America's security. Finally, the European problem endangers the viability of democracy itself. This last point is explained in this way:

To deny that Christianity had anything to do with the evolution of free, law-governed and prosperous European societies is more than a question of falsifying the past; it is also a matter of creating a future in which moral truth has no role in governance, in the determination of public policy, in understandings of justice, and in the definition of that freedom which

democracy is intended to embody.

In his quick overview of the "European" problem, Weigel has offered a provocative analysis of what ails Europe and what could sap the democratic resolve of the United States and undermine the cause of true freedom around the world. His conclusion is instructive:

Europe's crisis of civilizational morale teaches us that, while there are many lenses through which history can be read, theological lenses helps us to see deeper, farther, and more truly.



Questions/Activities

1. Is Weigel correct in his analysis of what ails Europe?
2. Test his thesis by doing a study of European and American positions and actions relative to
 - a.) Role of the United Nations
 - b.) Kyoto Protocol
 - c.) International Criminal Court of Justice
 - d.) Palestinian-Israeli Conflict
 - e.) Third World aid
 - f.) International Bank
 - g.) Religion
 - h.) Abortion Rights
 - i.) Iraq War
3. Does Canada fall in the European camp or more in the American camp overall? Explain your point of view.
4. Do you agree that 'theological lenses helps us to see deeper, farther, and more truly'? Elaborate.
5. In your view is Canada more secular and less religious than the United States?
6. Research the ongoing debate in Europe over the Constitution for the European Union.
 - a.) What are the controversial issues?
 - b.) Which nations, parties line up on opposing sides?