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COEDUCATION REVISITED FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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HERE IS SOMETHING RADICALLY WRONG WITH THE FAMILY AND THE RELATIONSHIP between the sexes in the West as we rapidly approach the third millennium of the Christian era. People and families are behaving very strangely, almost as if they were characters out of Walker Percy's novel, *Love Among the Ruins*, or Don Siegel's film, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. For example, could one imagine that the European Parliament, representing the community of European nations, would propose that homosexual relationships be given legal sanction equivalent to marriage? Indeed it would be hard to find similar situations in history, unless it be the pre-Christian paganism of the Roman Empire (cf. St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 1:11-20) or the behavior of the barbarian hordes of central Asia as they poured into a weak and decadent empire. However, their behavior could be simply attributed to original sin and its results and to their lack of Christianity. Today, in societies that are nominally Christian, we witness the phenomenon of women who do not act like women, nor men like men, nor families like families. Codes of moral behavior that have made the family the central unit of society and have been the "guardrails" of civilization for centuries have been discarded as antiquated. There are indices over the last 35 years which indicate disastrous societal changes in the United States.¹ When one looks for the roots of these societal problems, one has to look primarily at the state of the family but also at the system of education which presumably helps to form students in their behavior.

This abandonment of moral norms at an early age is evident in the public school systems of America. According to the California Department of Education, the top ranking problems in schools in 1940 were, in order: talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in halls, cutting in line, dress code infractions, and littering. Already by 1980 moral conduct had dramatically worsened in a way that would not have been imaginable in 1940. The 1980 list, in order, included: drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, and assault. A list in 1994 would almost certainly include guns in school, sexual harassment, and a large increase in communicable venereal diseases.

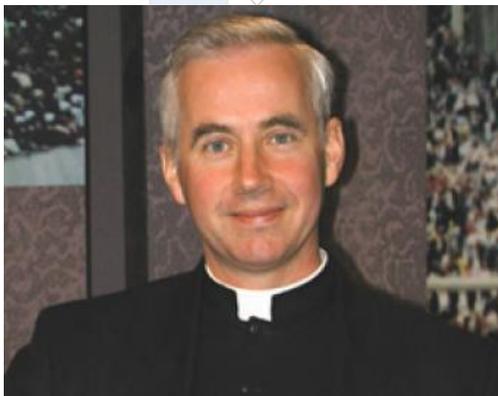
What is at the heart of the continuing social decline? What has spawned such high levels of contraception, divorce, child abuse, promiscuity, abortion, homosexual behavior, substance abuse, violent crime, pornography and a general degradation in what refers to the arts? The answers are too varied and complicated to examine here in depth, but let me suggest a few obvious ones. Christ and the teachings of his Church are increasingly ignored or attacked by the majority of society. The secularist ideology of the Enlightenment, with its concepts of the inevitability of progress, the goodness of human nature in the primitive state, equality of condition as the goal of morality, etc., and its philosophical offspring in the works of Freud, Marx, Darwin, and Mill, has been influential in shaping the moral behavior of society. And, quite simply, men no longer seek and obey the natural law. The natural law, among many other postulates, leads the rational man to acknowledge the radical differences that exist between men and women

and to take those differences into account in the functioning of society.

This paper highlights the value, indeed - insofar as it is possible - necessity of single-sex education, from the age of puberty through late adolescence. This would generally cover the ages from eleven or twelve through the early twenties. In the United States it would apply, more or less, from grade seven through the last year of undergraduate university studies. I believe that coeducation has been and continues to be a serious mistake because it generally ignores the radical differences between men and women in their biology, physiology, psychology, and in their proper roles in contemporary society and the family. I believe that these differences are good, that they are part of God's plan for the human race, and that by tampering with them over the course of decades we have brought the present state of society upon ourselves.

Naturally this means that I believe education has an end. That end is not simply to produce knowledge-filled autonomous individuals who are then free to seek and realize their hedonistic desires, nor to produce - a la John Dewey - citizens for our liberal democracy, but rather to form men and women who will form families, who see service to God, Church, society, and country as contributions to the common good, and who value their roles as father or mother, husband or wife above any professional goals bound up in security, enterprise, wealth, pleasure or personal realization. For the most part, coeducation historically has been brought about by the practical ideology of feminism which, in its most radical form, simply denies the essential differences between men and women. It essentially demands that they be treated the same in every way possible.

Lest this paper be totally one-sided, I should mention some of the arguments in favor of coeducation



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cited by the Spanish professor Victor Garcia Hoz - himself not a proponent of coeducation.¹ The first argument is economic. Coeducation is less expensive, requiring fewer classes, buildings, teach-

ers, etc. Second, he cites the theory that coeducation provides a more harmonious relationship between the sexes analogous to family life. It fosters understanding, knowledge, and reciprocal interchange between the sexes. It better reflects the democratic reality of the emancipation of women and their equal access to and capability for the workplace. Third, it offers psychological advantages in that it suppresses unhealthy curiosity and favors affective maturity. Finally, he points out, coeducation fosters Christian moral behavior by preventing sexual deviancy that can take place in single sex settings. We should keep these arguments in mind as we progress through the paper.

The Catholic Church has consistently taught both the value and expressed a preference for single-sex education, based above all on moral grounds. As we can see from below, the Church's teaching has also been validated and indeed has proven prophetic in many other elements of normal family life. Society ignores the moral teachings of the Church at its peril. A non-Catholic points the way:

I believe in all the essentials of Catholic teaching on sex and family. I arrived at these beliefs through laborious research in the secular literature on the subject and through long experience and observations of families rich and poor, all at a time when I regarded the Catholic Church as a retrograde body and myself as some kind of agnostic. I now believe in the divine inspiration of these Catholic insights and contend that a society can defy them only at the cost of an increasing estrangement from God.

In purely secular terms the Catholic view of sex and family has been entirely vindicated by recent events. Illegitimacy rates soaring in all the bastions of the permissive welfare state fully support the Catholic attack on state accommodations of teenage sex. Also vindicated, incidentally, is the traditional Catholic support, now mostly abandoned, for separating the sexes in schools and other activities as teenagers. With American women still earning less than 17 percent of family income in intact families, the Catholic insistence on the male providers' role with children seems entirely realistic.³

With birth rates 50% below the replacement level in much of northern Europe, the Catholic case against abortion seems conservative and mild. In just five generations, the current fertility

levels in such countries as Germany and Sweden would bring them near extinction - a rate some 96% short of replacing the current populations.

With the outbreak of AIDS and other medically baffling venereal diseases, the Catholic critique of liberated lifestyles and affirmation of monogamous, procreative sex seems a public health imperative. With recent census studies indicating that single women who wait until their thirties have less than a 20% chance of finding a husband, the Catholic encouragement of early marriage is fully vindicated. With half of all marriages currently projected to end in divorce, the idea of marriage as a breakable contract rather than a holy sacrament has proven unworkable everywhere. Unless marriage is permanent and sacred, it becomes an increasingly vulnerable and embattled institution that collapses before every temptation and crisis.

Around the world, social decline and sexual chaos is the universal harvest of reliance on secular, rationalist moral codes. In two centuries of effort, secular humanists have yet to come up with a way of transmitting ethics to children or persuading girls to say No. Without a religious foundation embracing all the essentials of Catholic teaching, neither marriage nor civilization, neither capitalism nor democracy can long survive in the modern world.⁴

An important question that should be raised is whether there should be a co-ed system even at the university level, given the state of “arrested adolescence” so common among affluent, upper middle class youth throughout America. This arrested adolescence is due to many factors. Among them are lack of religious formation, lack of strong family structures, a high level of physical comfort and financial security which often produces softness and laziness. Unlike their parents or grandparents, today’s youth have not had to live through serious economic depressions or world wars. With some notable exceptions,⁵ “college” has largely become at best a place for excellent pre-professional training and at worst an extended pre-paid, mortgaged four year vacation from the reality of work, marriage, and family.

As we can see, this matter is somewhat complex, as it is intertwined with many other issues including the purpose of education at both the university and secondary levels, the relationship between the sexes, sex educ-

ation (where the Catholic view is being vindicated statistically)⁶, school choice, home schooling, and fundamental questions regarding the purpose of marriage and family. The conclusion to be drawn by this brief study could be somewhat wrenching given the supposed “progress” that has been made in integrating women into the major universities in recent years. However, along with the teaching of the Church, which is sparse and recent, studies in the last ten years by social scientists and educators - many of whom theoretically and ideologically have reason to opine otherwise - continue to point out the radical differences between men and women from birth (and even conception).

These differences are naturally accentuated with the onset of puberty and become so strong that coeducation at the secondary and university levels is generally counterproductive to at least one of its stated purposes: the supposed advancement of women to some state of “equality” or even “sameness” with men. Although not conclusive, these recent studies show convincingly that women generally flourish in single-sex settings where they are not in competition with men. Naturally this calls into question gender roles and the ends and purposes of marriage and professional life. It is a given throughout this paper that the standards used to measure the “progress” of women should not be those used for men.



In what follows I will strive to examine the question from several viewpoints without, by any means, exhausting the topic. I will explain first the perennial teaching and practice of the Church. This teaching, although consistent, is remarkably sparse. One explanation for this fact is that, at least in the West, women generally did not receive *formal* education in the arts and sciences, nor did they study together with men until recent times (nonetheless, this did not prevent Margaret More, the daughter of St. Thomas More, from astonishing King Henry VIII with her learning!). I will also cite some of the more recent magisterial texts of the Church, particularly of John Paul II, on the role of women in society and the church. Finally, I will summarize the conclusions of recent work on the differences between women and men (particularly psychological ones) that indicate the value of a distinct approach towards learning for each sex. Mention will

also be made of some of the more recent studies on the effects of coeducation in the U.S., as highlighted in recent articles.

It should be noted at the outset, lest there be any mistake, that I am not attempting to “turn back the clock” with regard to the education of women. The opening of the world of the arts, and professions to women has been and should be a positive one in many aspects, particularly given the unique gifts and talents that women bring to these endeavors. To a great extent this has occurred almost exclusively in the West. However, inasmuch as this “opening” has encouraged women to place professional work (and autonomous “self-realization”) above marriage and family, it has had disastrous consequences. It is difficult if not impossible for women to pursue full-time professional work and effectively mother small children. Coeducation is one of the main contributors to such a mentality. As John Paul II puts it:

The work women do within the family units should be acknowledged and deeply appreciated. The “toil” of a woman who, having given birth to a child, nourishes and cares for that child and devotes herself to its upbringing, particularly in the early years, is so great as to be comparable to’ any professional work ... Motherhood, because of all the hard work it entails, should be recognized, as giving the rights to financial benefits at least equal to those of other kinds of work undertaken in order to support the family during such a delicate phase of its life.⁷

I have spent a considerable amount of my priestly life working with college students at elite universities on the East Coast of the U.S., the majority of which - until the last thirty years - were single sex for men or co-institutional, with separate divisions for men and women at the same university. At first I was struck with what appeared to be the naturalness of the young men and women co-habiting and studying together, almost, it appeared, as if they were brothers and sisters. Only with the passage of time did I begin to see the damage done to these students morally, psychologically, and even physiologically (particularly to young women), not to mention the damage to their education. If it is true, as the Church constantly affirms, that according to the natural law the highest vocation of women (apart from a life of apostolic celibacy) is to motherhood and family life, this educational environment often has negative effects on such a goal. Promiscuity, loss of virginity, abortions, pregnan-

cies out of wedlock, attempted suicides, psychosomatic diseases such as bulimia and anorexia, the beginnings of alcoholism⁸ along with relatively few positive female role models - all combined to convince me that the current system was harmful to all but the exceptionally strong and well-formed girl. On a more natural plane, there has been an almost total disappearance of the concepts of courtesy, dating, courtship, and healthy romance which flourish where marriage and family are valued. The slovenliness of dress and manners is still another symptom of the failure of the current system.

At the same time, it was taboo, almost unthinkable, to even *suggest* a possible change, or reevaluation of the “new” system or to propose a return to single sex education as formerly practiced. The fact that for thousands of years people married, begat children, worked and - at least in the West - even “progressed” in the material and scientific sense without coeducation could not be taken into account. The fairly rapid growth of fraternities and sororities, virtually the only places where men and women can be alone with members of the same sex, has been ignored. While there are celebrations commemorating the beginnings of coeducation in formerly single-sex schools - complete with paroxysms of self-congratulation - there is nary a dissenting voice heard or allowed.

Ironically, at a moment when all the evidence points to their great value, Catholic girl’s schools continue to decline in the U.S. due to lack of vocations for the religious congregations that formerly staffed them and to subsequent financial problems. At the same time formerly all-male schools are opening their doors to women at the university and high school levels. In some cases these institutions have decided to end centuries of dedication to all-male education. Thus, they fall into a compromise with modernity in order to survive the lack both of male students and male religious staff vocations.

The injustice done to these students is immense. The great majority of them cannot articulate why they are studying, other than vague references to career or “service to humanity.” All of this in an atmosphere where power, physical attractiveness, sexual conquests, leisure time, economic security and the amassing of wealth are the underlying, if unarticulated, goals of everyday life. A relatively few young men and women are capable, after some reflection, of understanding that they are living in a polluted atmosphere, and that holiness, commitment, marriage and family, truth, character and virtue should be

the ends of an integral education. (I have dealt with some of these matters in other articles. See particularly my views on campus ministry and Catholic colleges.) Suffice it to say that although my experience is solely with secular universities, I have no reason to believe (with a few exceptions) that the situation is substantially different in Catholic universities. Indeed, I believe that one could show that the introduction of coeducation in these institutions had a strong negative effect on the traditional liberal arts emphasis of those schools. They thereby lost all or part of the intellectual strength and Catholic identity so strongly praised by such intellectual giants of this century as Jacques Maritain and Christopher Dawson.

As we mentioned earlier there is relatively little in the teaching authority of the Church on coeducation, since the phenomenon is still relatively new (and may be a passing fancy at least vis a vis a historical institution like the Church). At the same time, after its initial strong warnings, the Church, though not retracting its teachings, has scarcely addressed the question. This may be out of respect for the future prudential judgment of those who have to tackle the question of education, religious or otherwise, under difficult social conditions. It may also be simply awaiting the results over time of this social experiment in order to see if its judgment should be modified.

Pope Pius XI in 1929 wrote an encyclical entitled “Christian Education of Youth” where he addressed the topic of coeducation in several paragraphs which I will reproduce below. It is placed between two other sections, one on “sex instruction” and the other on the “Christian family.” One can see that coeducation must have already been making inroads in the Catholic schools, as well as in general society, for the matter to be of sufficient import to be addressed:

False also and harmful to Christian education is the so-called method “co-education.” This too, by many of its supporters is founded upon naturalism and the denial of original sin; but by all, upon a deplorable confusion of ideas that mistakes a leveling promiscuity and equality, for the

legitimate association of the sexes. The Creator has ordained and disposed perfect union of the sexes only in matrimony, and, with varying degrees of contact, in the family and in society. Besides there is not in nature itself, which fashions the two quite different in organism, in temperament, in abilities, anything to suggest that there can be or ought to be promiscuity, and much less equality in the training of the two sexes. These, in keeping with the wonderful designs of the Creator, are destined to complement each other in the family and in society, precisely because of the differences, which therefore ought to be maintained and encouraged during their years of formation with the necessary distinction and corresponding separation, according to age and circumstances. These principles, with due regard to time and place, must in accordance with Christian prudence, be applied to all schools particularly in the most delicate and decisive period of formation, that, namely, of adolescence; and in gymnastic exercises and deportment, special care must be had of Christian modesty in young women and girls, which is so gravely impaired by any kind of exhibition in public.

Recalling the terrible words of the Divine Master: “Woe to the world because of scandals! (Matt 18:7)” We must earnestly appeal to your solicitude and your watchfulness, Venerable Brethren, against these pernicious errors, which, to the immense harm of youth, are spreading far and wide among the Christian people.

In order to obtain perfect education, it is of the utmost importance to see that all those conditions which surround the child during the period of his formation, in other words that the combination of circumstances which we call environment, correspond exactly to the end proposed.¹⁰

Pius XI underlines the “legitimate” association



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and complementarity of the sexes and “their differences which ought to be maintained and encouraged ... particularly in the most delicate and decisive period of formation, *adolescence*.” The language that he employs is forceful: “false” and “harmful,” which does not leave much room for interpretation. One gets a strong notion that the Holy Father considers this an important pastoral concern, given the strength and directness of his words. He speaks of “confusion of ideas,” which seems to sum up admirably much of the practice of coeducation. It is interesting to note that the only quotation cited is from Scripture, “Woe to the world because of scandals,” particularly given the current environment in Church and society.

In 1957 the Holy See gave a more complete description of its viewpoint on coeducation in an Instruction from the Congregation for Religious.¹¹ It reaffirmed that coeducation could not be approved in a general way. It also stated that the moral dangers of coeducation, particularly during puberty, are more serious than any other possible advantages, and that coeducation cannot simply be looked upon as a continuation of family life. However, it did concede that the good of Catholic education is of prime importance, thus permitting coeducation in a Catholic school if necessary. Evidently it is preferable to receive the moral and religious training in a Catholic school even if the educational setting is not ideal. It also recommended, under such circumstances, a form of instruction known as co-institutional, whereby boys and girls could be instructed separately using the same facilities.

We can now move on to the Second Vatican Council, which tells us that:

All men of whatever race, condition, or age, in virtue of the dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to education. This education should be suitable to the particular destiny of individuals, adapted to their ability, sex (my emphasis) ... True education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share.

Due weight being given to the *advances in psychological, pedagogical, and intellectual sciences* (my emphasis), children and young people should be helped to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual qualities. They should be

trained to acquire gradually a more perfect sense of responsibility in the proper development of the own lives by constant effort and in the pursuit of liberty, overcoming obstacles with unwavering courage and perseverance. As they grow older they should receive a positive and prudent education in matters relating to sex.¹²

The Council places a heavy emphasis on the “ends” of education, understood both as spiritual ends and the temporal goods of the society and family. A theme which could be understood as central to all Council teaching is mentioned here: the dignity of the human person. This end is not just supernatural, but also prepares people for their duties as regards the good of society. One of the constant themes of this forward looking Council is that technological “advances” or - progress in the sciences - is not exempt from this notion of human dignity. Precisely one of the points of this paper is to show that the sciences almost unanimously point to the advantages of single sex education. The Council certainly reaffirms the content of Pius XI’s encyclical and further develops it, quoting it extensively (although it makes no direct mention of the subject of coeducation).

Pope John Paul II has touched on these themes, albeit indirectly, in two of his encyclicals, *Familiaris Consortio* and *Mulieris Dignitatem*, dealing, respectively, with the role of the family and women in modern day society, themes which obviously are germane to our topic. Mention should be made here of various lines from the former:

There is no doubt that equal dignity and responsibility of men and women fully justifies women’s access to public functions. On the other hand, the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role ... Society should be structured in such a way that wives and mothers aren’t in practice compelled to work outside the home ... Furthermore the mentality which honors women more for their work outside the home than for their work within the family must be overcome ... But clearly all of this does not mean for women a renunciation of their femininity or an imitation of the male role, but the fullness of true feminine humanity.¹³

Amazingly enough, in the United States young women are opting out of the job market and staying

home, reversing a decades-long trend.¹⁴ The explanation given by the author is an economic one. “[D]ue to the plunge in interest rates and consequently home mortgage rates it is now possible for a woman to both stay at home and have a home. Moreover, the average working woman’s real wages have remained so low that it doesn’t seem probable that she would want to work. After paying for child care - not to mention lunches, bus tokens, and a working wardrobe - she may well find herself laboring for free.”¹⁵ Another complementary explanation may be that nature is reasserting itself and that young women are not willing to put up with handling two full time tasks after having seen the experience of their mothers and older sisters.

These magisterial teachings raise the question as to whether there should not be on both secondary and university levels an educational option for women that is primarily dedicated to their formation as future wives and mothers. It would seem to make sense that a majority of women could receive a basic liberal arts education in order to help them to pass on to their children the Western patrimony in history, art, music, literature, etc. Additionally, they would have the opportunity to complement their college studies with what were previously known (and very popular as) home economics or domestic sciences, to better prepare them for their natural and normal function as mothers and wives. Of course, this would not prevent young women who are intent on pursuing a professional career outside the home from following their normal course of studies in the university.

In the latter encyclical, written on the occasion of the Marian year of 1987, John Paul II makes reference in his own particular theological language to the damage done by original sin to the male-female relationship, particularly the danger of male domination:

The revealed truth concerning the creation of the human being as male and female constitutes the principal argument against all the objectively injurious and unjust situations which contain and express the inheritance of sin which all human beings bear within themselves.... In our times the question of “women’s rights” has taken on new significance in the broad context of the rights of the human person ... In the name of liberation from male “domination” women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine “originality.” There is a well founded fear that if they take this path,

women will not reach “fulfillment” but instead will *deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness....* The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different. Hence, a woman, as well as a man, must understand her “fulfillment” as a person, the dignity and vocation, on the basis of these resources, according to the richness of the femininity which she received on the day of creation and which she inherits as an expression of the “image and likeness of God” that is specifically hers.¹⁶



The Holy Father is here emphasizing that a person’s fulfillment (male or female) is based, above all, in the recognition of their nature as God created them and in the development of their character and personality through the use of the choices they make throughout their life. The attempted escape from one’s own metaphysical identity (physically, psychologically, spiritually, etc.) inevitably places tensions and strains within the person which impact on both family and society. John Paul II has repeated many times that what a person “is” has priority over what he “does” or “has.”

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,¹⁷ a definitive and recent Magisterial text, the Church, speaking of men and women underlines “the equality and differences willed by God” (Pts. 369-373) and the fact that “men and women are made for one another” and “they are at the same time equal inasmuch as they are persons, and complementary inasmuch as they are masculine and feminine.” The text also points out the importance of the virtues of modesty and chastity, obviously applicable to both men and women given the current permissiveness of customs. “Chastity represents a task eminently personal; and implies a *cultural effort* since the development of the human person and the growth of society itself are mutually conditioned (GS 25, 1). Chastity supposes the respect of the rights of the person, in particular, to receive information and education (my emphasis) that respects the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life (pt. 2344).”

Given the current state of almost unprecedented permissiveness of morals among young people who are heavily and unduly influenced by the mass media, I have serious doubts that chastity can be promoted and lived in a coeducational setting without extraordinary efforts on the parts of the students, and almost authoritarian vigilance on the part of teachers and parents. Mention should be made here of current customs prevalent in the majority of universities where students - public, private and Catholic - board in mixed dormitories where chastity and modesty are made difficult to live and where the “permissiveness of customs” is a sad and daily reality. Can one imagine or find any other time or place in history where young men and women between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two have been wantonly and indiscriminately thrown together in cramped living quarters essentially without any adult supervision?

A final word will be added here particularly given that we are celebrating the “Year of the Family” as proclaimed both by the United Nations and the Holy See. In pts. 2221-2231 of the *Catechism*, the Church restates the key and primary role of parents in the education of their children. “Parents are the first ones responsible for the education of their children” (pt. 2223). In regard to schools it says that, “The parents have the right to select for their children a school that corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. Inasmuch as possible, parents have the duty of selecting schools that best help them in their educative task” (2229). Ideally, therefore, in a Christian society, the state (or government) would assure that single-sex education would be available during the formative years for all desiring it, either provided by the state or as an option in state financed private education.

Now I would like to pass on to a discussion of the topic of coeducation from a different perspective. This viewpoint underlines elements that have surfaced several times in the magisterial text, i.e., the difference and complementarity of the sexes, and consequently their different ends. Much of this is simply a reflection of common sense, or what is known as the natural law, or those principles which can be known by right reason.

A part of the problem consists, I believe, in a society which has lost any sense of tradition and history and at the same time lacks a positive vision for the future. In the current hedonistic environment, pleasure and autonomous self-realization are the standard for living. As

Russell Kirk pointed out in his classic *The Conservative Mind*, “(Our) people have come to look upon society, vaguely, as a homogeneous mass of identical individuals, with indistinguishable abilities and needs,



Russell Kirk

whose happiness may be secured from direction by above, through legislation or some matter of public instruction.” When men and women live in an atmosphere where power, wealth, achievement, celebrity and pleasure are treasured above all else, the importance and goodness of forming a family, educating children in truth and tradition, become not only outmoded, but are made almost impossible save by heroic effort. Education simply becomes a means to an economic and utilitarian end, and the value of specifically oriented male or female formation is derided and finally eliminated.

The author Anne Husted Burleigh has some interesting points to make in this regard speaking of the education of women:

Young women, on the other hand, no longer receive in their education any pattern of what they might be expected to do in life. When they march off the graduation platform, their lives yawn toward a frightening open end. By this time they have come through sixteen years of schooling, exposed to a drum beat of ideology that tells them they must imitate men in seeking careers in the world, that denies that they have any distinct feminine calling of their own, that preaches that their potential vocation as wives and mothers is merely an alternative lifestyle which they may choose one day, but if they do, that vocation is only one among many careers, no higher than any other and certainly most desirable when pursued in combination with a “real” career. Little wonder that young women dare not admit openly that they may think themselves called primarily to be wives and mothers. When asked what they hope to do in life, most feel compelled to declare some specific career goal. Only in sheepish embarrassment do they sometimes add the aside that they also look forward to getting married someday. And even then they will likely not allow themselves the further admission that they hope also

to have a baby - and maybe even more than one baby. Those natural feminine hopes of being a wife and a mother are not permitted to surface in the modern technical world that faces today's young women. Any such inclination must remain inside the secret heart of girls.¹⁸

In today's secondary education, and to a much greater extent in the university, the ideology of feminism is so strongly rooted that it is rare and courageous for young women even to admit the possibility of marriage and children as a good in itself (even though the great majority will surely marry and have children). It is even rarer to view this as the superior purpose of their lives as women, to which their education should be oriented. Consequently, they enter marriage often sexually experienced but not ready, or necessarily willing, to fulfill their maternal role. Indeed, almost immediately conflicts arise as to their role in marriage and family as well as in society, often leading to enormous marital and familial problems and, not infrequently, to divorce.

Of all tasks that present themselves to a young woman the most important is surely the care and formation of souls. When a young mother holds in her arms her new baby, she holds a tiny barbarian with the potential for becoming a saint. The vocation of this young mother is to impart her child the intellectual and spiritual treasures of her civilization. Her aim is to help her child toward that integration of soul, that is, toward that state in which his mind, properly instructed, truly governs the other levels of his being, in which he is able to subject his entire self to the governance of right reason. What the young mother must do is to teach her child how to use his freedom in the only way he can remain free - that is, by doing right. To rear a free man, this young woman must herself understand what freedom is. Thus she herself requires an education befitting a free person, an education that explains to her why she is free at all. Unfortunately the education she most often receives these days is more proper to the citizen of a totalitarian regime, in which education merely aims at turning out technicians who are useful to the state.¹⁹

G. K. Chesterton, the famous Catholic apologist of the earlier part of this century, deplores the attack against common sense and nature that he sees not only

in coeducation but in the lack of sense of purpose or finality in the single sex female education of his time.

But there are no new ideas about female education. There is not, there has never been, even the vestige of a new idea. All the educational reformers did was ask what was being done to boys and then go and do it to girls ... What they call new ideas are very old ideas in the wrong place ... It will then be answered, not without a sneer, "And what would you prefer? Would you go back to the elegant early Victorian female, with ringlets and smelling bottle, doing a little in water colors, dabbling a little in Italian, playing a little on the harp, writing in vulgar albums and painting on senseless screens? Do you prefer that?" To which I answer, "Emphatically, yes." I solidly prefer it to the new female education, for this reason, that I can see in it an intellectual design, while there is none in the other.²⁰

Of course, today there appears to be increasingly less intellectual design as to the purpose of education and more ideological manipulation. This is often unnoticed by the parents on whose shoulders rest the primary obligation of educating their offspring.

Chesterton here also introduces a query regarding the suitability of rugged sports for women, an almost sacrosanct topic in the U.S. "Even a savage could see that bodily things, at least, which are good for a man are very likely to be bad for a woman. Yet there is no boy's game, however brutal, which these mild lunatics have not promoted among girls."²¹ I would like to see a study done on the incidents of serious injuries and physical problems that arise from women's sports and their effects on future reproductive capacity. Women's sports, on some campuses, have become havens for what is perhaps unhealthy segregation from men. This could be true for a variety of reasons: for many women, female sports are the only refuge on campus away from predator males; there is an obvious lack of modesty and emphasis put on physicality in this atmosphere; the playing field is a place where women are encouraged to act like males. Sports for women, as well as men, by their nature are healthy. I am simply referring to an overemphasis on masculine traits in sports in the case of women. In any case, the question should be further researched.

Chesterton states roundly that the "world must keep one great amateur, lest we all become artists and

perish. Somebody must renounce all specialist conquests that she may conquer all the conquerors. That she may be a queen of life, she must not be a private soldier in it.”²² He places motherhood on a pedestal at the very heart of the family and society. For him female education must be aimed, above all, at forming “the one great amateur at the center of the world.” Today we would employ the word “generalist” in place of “amateur.” Women as mothers have to employ a variety of talents, knowledge, and experience to the rearing of children. This need, of course, is multiplied by the number of children with their different personalities and needs.

Investigations by scholars over the last several decades have only reinforced what common sense observation tells us, i.e., there are substantial *natural* differences between men and women. It is not by any means simply a question of differences in external physiology or those induced solely by environmental upbringing and attitudes. As George Gilder put it:

The problem is the sociological view: the belief in a society of monads that are to be treated as human beings. But I have never met a human being, and I hope I never do. In this world, there are only men and women; and they are very different from one another. *Vive la difference* ... Some of the reasons are biological [speaking of the different rates of success between men and women in the business world]. The evidence is overwhelming that men and women are genetically dissimilar in ways well beyond the obvious physical differences. Feminist psychologists Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin sum it up in *The Psychology of Sex Differences*: 1) Males are more aggressive than females in all human societies for which evidence is available. 2) The sex differences are found early in life, at a time when there is no evidence that differential socialization pressures have been brought to bear by adults to “shape” aggression differently in the two sexes. 3) Similar sex differences are found in man and sub-human primates. 4) Aggression is related to levels of sex hormones, and can be changed by experimental administrations of these hormones.²³

As another author puts it: “Let us look at nature. What do we see between boys and girls aside from anatomical differences? There are too many features to list here ... A few of the masculine: objective, analytic, task-oriented, providing, hard, brutal, head-dominating, spiri-

tually active and future oriented; as respectively described for the feminine: intuitive, wise, quality-of-life oriented, nurturing, soft and delicate, sweet, heart dominating, spiritually contemplative, and present oriented.”²⁴ These qualities, although not all inclusive or adequately descriptive, nevertheless are apparent in children from an early age regardless of race, culture, or environment. Blessed Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei, tells us that “women are called to bring to the family, to society, and to the Church, characteristics which are their own and which alone they can give: their gentle warmth and untiring generosity, their love for detail, their quick-wittedness and intuition, their simple and deep piety, their constancy. . . .”²⁵

As the noted psychologist Rudolph Allers put it:

Character training is harder in the case of girls with boys, although the contrary belief is generally held; for, as things are today, the girl must be prepared for two eventualities - for motherhood, with all that it involves, and for the life of an independent wage earner. This alone is a good reason against the parallel education of boys and girls; and the careful investigations of K. Buhler show that the time-factor in the development of the two sexes is so different that coeducation is impracticable except in the period before school and the early school years. Even if considerations of possible moral risk be ignored, the idea of complete coeducation throughout the whole period of youth is shown to be completely mistaken.²⁶

I should point out here, lest there be any confusion, that the socialization of the sexes is fundamentally important given both their ends and their natural and necessary complementarity. Socialization can and should be realized in various ways whether it be in home, in the community, or in the workplace as, of course, has been the case throughout history. After all, all men have had biological mothers (even in this high-tech age) and the great majority have spent their formative years living with them and in many cases with sisters at home. However, coeducation during the formative years of development through adolescence is normally a distraction, sometimes a temptation, and usually counterproductive to its proposed purposes.

Now we will pass on to the final section of this paper, which deals with some of the actual studies done on the effects of coeducation on the secondary level and

its deleterious consequences, particularly on high school age women. There is also increasing evidence to show that single-sex education is of significant benefit to young men.²⁷ In fact there have been efforts on the part of authorities in the “inner cities” of America to promote such programs in the public schools as a means of building character and enforcing discipline. Due to space constraints this paper deals primarily with the advantages and disadvantages of coeducation with regard to females, given their central role in the family and society. Hopefully, I can deal with these matters in regard to males at another time. There are ample sources available for such a study.

Interestingly enough, the studies cited below are generally done by people who are ideologically in agreement with a certain style of feminism who certainly do not posit marriage and motherhood as primordial ends for women. They are all in favor of women competing with men in the workplace, even in combat positions in the Armed Forces, yet they seem to want to postpone the competition until after high school, or even college. One wonders why they do not question the legitimacy of competition with men in the workplace as well.

Much of the problems with coeducational schools vis a vis education is simply a question of male dominance that appears to be inevitable and constant according to all the studies. As Deborah Tannen put it in her best seller of some years ago: In analyzing tape recordings of private conversations among teenagers, Deborah Lange found a similar pattern. When the girls were alone, they talked about problems in their relationship with friends; when boys were alone, they talked about activities and plans, and made comments about friends. When boys and girls were together they talked about activities and plans, and made comments about friends.

In other words, when boys and girls talked together, they talked more or less the way boys talked when there were no girls present. But when girls got together with no boys present, they talked very differently.

All these (and many other) studies show that male-female conversations are more like

men’s conversation than they are like women’s. So when women and men talk to each other, both make adjustments, but the women make more. Women are at a disadvantage in mixed-sex groups, because they have had less practice in conducting conversation the way it is being conducted in these groups. *This may help to explain why girls do better at single-sex schools, whereas boys do about the same whether they go to boys’ schools or coeducational ones* (my emphasis).²⁸

“Much of the problems with coeducational schools vis a vis education is simply a question of male dominance that appears to be inevitable and constant according to all the studies.”

Some of the study’s results are measured by levels of individual self-esteem which, in secular terms, often appears to be the absolute standard for happiness.

In the fall of 1990, the American Association of University Women fielded an important study entitled “Short-changing Girls, Shortchanging Women.” Below are listed four of the key findings, with commentary, by the Emma Willard School, a prestigious East Coast all girl’s prep school:

1. A self-esteem “gender gap” increases as our children grow up. As children grow older from elementary school on up they tend to think less and less well of themselves.

2. Declining self-esteem, a governor on dreams and actions, affects girls much more drastically than boys. Most boys refer to their talents as what they like the most about themselves. Girls, unfortunately, are twice as likely as to mention their physical appearance as the thing they like the most. Naturally the question of physical appearance and its importance is highly exacerbated in a coeducational setting.

3. Family and schools, not peers, have the greatest impact on adolescent self-esteem and aspirations. Across co-ed grade levels boys get four more times the attention from teachers than do girls. Teachers engage boys more in dialogue and expect boys to grasp and defend more complex ideas. Another study points out that in a coeducational setting even the brightest women often remain silent. Other more subtle forms of discrimination exist in co-ed classes, including calling on males by name more often than women, addressing the class as if no wom-

en were present, probing male responses more, addressing male questions at greater length, and giving male students credit and praise for their observation in subsequent discussion.

4. Math and science have the strongest impact on self-esteem for young women. As girls “learn” they are not good in math and science, their sense of self-worth and their career aspirations plummet. Boys who do not excel at math or science dismiss their poor grades because the subjects are not useful or interesting. Girls, on the other hand, interpret their failure in math and science as personal failures.

The conclusion of the Willard School summary is that, “Research indicates that girls are generally at a distinct disadvantage in a co-ed environment. Single-sex education, on the other hand, provides significant advantages for girls on every front.”²⁹

These conclusions are beginning to be widely recognized, as witnessed by recent articles in the opinion setting newspapers *The New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. *The Times* headlines an article in this way: “All-girl classes to help girls keep up with boys,”³⁰ and the *Journal* informs us that even “Co-ed Schools are studying all-girl classes.”³¹ So it happens that co-ed high schools, both public and private, are separating boys and girls, at least in the math and science classes where girls are at a distinct disadvantage.³² Indeed, the natural reaction that one would expect to find in most societies is taking place in the U.S., where the *Times* tells us that, “Women’s Colleges find a new popularity.”³³ It appears that in the last eight years enrollment in women colleges in the U.S. has risen almost 25%. According to the officials of the colleges, their institutions produce a larger proportions of Ph.D.’s and more leaders in government and business, and therefore are attracting more women. What, of course, they don’t infer is that women may simply feel more comfortable being educated with their peers of the same sex.

With this paper, I hope to have at least “raised the consciousness” of the reader regarding the various problems connected with coeducation and the virtues of single sex education in our present day society. Coeducation is largely taken by the immense majority of the populace as normal, natural and necessary, although increasingly almost all the evidence is to the contrary. I would take as my own the conclusions of Stephen Clark regarding the effects of the weakening of men’s and women’s distinc-

tive roles and apply them to the effects of coeducation³⁵:

1. Future family life is weakened. Young men and women become confused as to the ultimate meaning of their sexuality.
2. Sexual relationships become troubled. We only need look at the statistics to be satisfied on that score.
3. Women often lose a sense of value. Girls lose a sense of the greatness of who they are, as daughters of God, future wives, and mothers, and not as instruments of sexual satisfaction for men with whom they are called to compete on a supposedly level playing field in the professional world.
4. Manly and womanly roles are neglected.
5. Men and women develop psychological instabilities. One only needs to open up the telephone pages of any municipality to see the scores of psychiatrists, psychologists, and marriage counselors who have a thriving business based on these instabilities. One could also take a glance at the best-sellers lists of books over the last decades to see how many are catering to the emotionally and psychologically wounded of our society.



When looking at the societal wreckage of the loss of distinction between the roles of the sexes, I am reminded of the saying that “God always forgives, man sometimes forgives, and nature never forgives.” Nature’s lack of forgiveness is reflected in the continuing and increasing discord in marriage and family in our society. We can only expect a continuation of this chaos unless there is change.

I am not certain to what extent the current system of education for men and women is a cause or a symptom, but in any case it should continue to be examined courageously and objectively. It is clear to me that coeducation from the onset of puberty (which occurs increasingly early in the U.S. due to nutritional factors) through early adulthood (increasingly later due to what I referred

to earlier as “arrested adolescence” in the U.S.) is highly problematic. This judgment conforms with the constant teaching of the Church. The sexes, therefore, should be educated separately from at least the age of 12 through high school, and serious thought should be given to single-sex education in the university. It may happen that in centuries to come coeducation will be seen as an aberrant social experiment in the twentieth century that was largely abandoned due to its documented negative effects on family, culture, and society.

I would largely agree with the analysis of Dr. Allers:

Nobody would be prepared to dispute the fact that present social conditions are very far from satisfactory; nobody can be blind to the fact that the position of women is, generally speaking, not a good one, although happily there are a large number of women whose lot is pleasant, and whose attitude towards life is right. Although the number of male neurotics is by no means small, women still form the main body of those who suffer in this way, which shows that, on the whole, women are in a worse state of conflict than men - not that it proves anything about a special predisposition in the case of woman. It is a matter of urgent necessity for the maintenance of individual and communal normality and a desirable level of morals and religion that a serious start should be made to analyze the problems of which we have just hinted here. At this point we immediately find ourselves faced with insuperable obstacles, as in the case of the education of children and adults. If our efforts fail, it is only in the smallest degree due to the operation of natural limitations; nor is it due to the fact that we were brought up against people who are stubborn and whose disposition, constitution - call it what you will - renders a change of mind impossible. Such a failure is due to the obstacles imposed by existing social, economic, and worldwide political conditions, and ultimately to the fact that the minds of the great mass of mankind are so lacking in a true communal consciousness that the real sense of humanity has to a large extent been lost. It is unnecessary to refer to the way in which man may lose the feeling for human things to the same degree he has alienated himself from things divine ... The problems - nowadays acute - of women's

women's education, women's occupation, the position of women in the family and communal life, and, bound up with these, the future of the children, the race, and the Church, can only be solved by intensive and all-embracing reforms (my emphasis). Neither by a trivial attempt to creep back to past conditions - always illusory - not by grumbling and effecting improvements first in one direction and then another, but only by a genuine and deep change of heart (metanoia) affecting our whole civilization can there be any improvement. Where is he who shall summon us to prepare the way of the Lord? We hear many who cry out in the wilderness; but there is no voice possessed of the power and urgency of John the Baptist. It is high time for someone to seek to awaken and stir up mankind. Change your hearts!³⁵

Most probably it will simply be ordinary parents in Catholic families who will reassert their primary rights to educate their children in a way that is consonant with human nature, divine revelation and the teachings of the Church, thus reforming the current system. As Pope John Paul II has recently put in a letter written especially to celebrate this international year of the family: “Parents are the first and most important educators of their own children, and they possess a fundamental competence in this area: they are educators because they are parents.” ... The Church's constant and trusting prayer during the Year of the Family is for the education of man, so that families will persevere in their task of education with courage, trust, and hope, in spite of difficulties occasionally so difficult as to appear insuperable.”³⁶ To build the “civilization of love” for the next millennium demands no less.

NOTES

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- 7John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (Rome, Vatican Press, 1994), pp. 68-9.
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- 35Rudolph Allers, op. cit., pp.276-7
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