

10/26/97

To Dr. Robert Blum
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Bob,

I was very interested to see what you would say in response to the statements of Debra Haffner, President of SIECUS, as she spoke about "Healthy Adolescent Sexuality" last Thursday evening. You chose to only take issue (and very gently) with one contention (that the data supported her position that SIECUS type sex education did not increase sexual activity.) You mentioned, of course, that it did not decrease it either. I think it would have been fair of you to state that some studies did show a trend towards increases (Harris poll, Marsiglio and Mott)

Of course, decrease in sexual activity is not really their stated goal, but rather to promote "positive attitudes." Still, they don't like to be vulnerable to accusations from parents who are concerned about the concrete effects.

What really amazed me is the complete lack of response, by any one in the room, to Ms. Haffner's comments on psychological effects of impermanent sexual relationships. She, first of all, dismissed the "abstinence-until-marriage" programs as "fear-based." I tried to point out that if there is indeed something to fear, fear is a very appropriate emotion. Yet, the truth, for those really willing to look without prejudice, is that those programs portray sex as something beautiful within the proper limits, dangerous outside of them. As you can imagine, fire safety could be taught very similarly without saying that fire should never be used by anyone. And as I detailed, we have good empirical evidence of lives ruined by unfettered sexual expression.

What really took us down the rabbit hole, however, was her answer to the concern that there are psychological consequences to sex outside of marriage. Remember what she said? I will never forget it. Since so many people are doing it, she said, if it were harmful, "there ought to be all sorts of psychological problems in this country."

The short answer, as you well know, is that there ARE all sorts of psychological problems in this country. And for anyone who has experienced (or seen up close) the breakup of a sexual relationship, it would be a very reasonable working hypothesis to suppose that there just might be problems. So, what she said was not only unscientific but even counter-intuitive. And this is not some rube on a talk show, mind you, but the president of a major sex education organization. And all you academic types let it stand.

You got real picky about the quality of the data I showed you a few years ago supporting chastity-only programs -- and, by the way the studies have gotten better. Why do you not turn that skepticism on the other side? Is political correctness so powerful that even someone as secure as you dare not challenge it? There is good reason to investigate -- or look seriously at the results of

those who have already investigated -- the effects of impermanent sexual relationships on rates of depression, suicide, chemical use, risk taking behavior and violence.

Finally, I say it with compassion, I think Ms. Haffner may indeed be exhibit A for long term effects. She spoke of people who have so much victimization in their past that they cannot see or respond clearly. I agree, it is a terrible thing, and I suspect that for her it is autobiographical. For unless I misunderstood, she basically said that all sexual encounters, even within marriage, should be "protected." In other words, "Trust no one." Is this a psychologically healthy attitude? Could the stridency and irrationality be a cover for unresolved pain?

It is a tragedy, and likely to increase as we give the green light to act out impulses. It is a gross misunderstanding of human nature that given proper information, people can get into sexually stimulating situations and then proceed with altruism and rationality. And as I have tried to say many times, consent is a slippery subject. Sometimes it only means, "I trust you," or "I believe that you will cherish me forever as I will cherish you forever."

You have undoubtedly seen the case of the 12 year old girl and her teacher (who claimed that their sexual relationship was consensual.) He wanted her on birth control without parental interference. You know something? If you asked the girl, she might even agree. But most people, except for the guy involved in it, and a small group of "child liberationists" see this is wrong. But the same arguments used to support all other sorts of behavior are just as applicable to pedophilia. And among those who "celebrate their sexuality," some will decide to do it with kids.

I challenge you to invite a speaker for the other side -- that the only logical place to draw the line is with lifetime commitment. Those who say, "Oh, of course, we support abstinence, but are not so narrow minded," are not the same. Ms. Haffner was alarmed that so many states are inviting the abstinence-only programs to apply and disturbed that many parents seem to want them. Isn't that enough reason to hear from one of the dreaded sources directly.

Gynecologist Joe McIlhaney of Medical Institute for Sexual Health would be a good choice. So would Kathleen Sullivan of Project Respect. Since their side does not get much exposure, just having one or both of them without rebuttal would be more than fair. After all, you gave no official platform for those who disagree with SIECUS. But maybe a side by side conference or even a debate would draw a bigger audience.

I have never seen the chastity/abstinence side of the issue brought to the table by anyone other than a religious organization. And if you think that means it is untouchable by public institutions, look at the U.S. founders documents again. Their perspective runs from "all men are created equal" to the refusal of permission by an early 19th Century Congress to a Frenchman who wanted to start a humanistic public school, "because public education must be based on the Bible." I am not making this up. Ask me and I will send you the documents.

I gave you the chance a few years ago to sponsor a talk by Dr. David Larson, of National Institutes for Healthcare Research, on the topic of faith and health. You expressed interest but demurred because he dealt mainly with

adults. Since then, his data have gone mainstream and with Templeton grants he even has established programs in a sizable number of medical schools. All this despite the opposition of psychiatry, which for years scared people away from even looking at the relationship and claimed, without the benefit of data, that religion was harmful.

Here is a chance to ride the next expose'. Be the first one on your block to throw away the little red book and actually look at the world. At least one generation has already been sacrificed on the altar of sexual freedom. The future of the next generation -- if it is not already too late -- hangs in the balance.

I never heard from you regarding my poem. I assume you got it. It did not require an answer, but I hope it stimulated thought. I know you like to hide behind the shield of post modernism ("who cares, because nothing is real anyway"). But I suspect you know deep inside that the position is inherently irrational and paints you into an intellectual corner better suited to an ingrown hermit than a merchant in the marketplace of ideas.

I do not claim to be smarter than you. I am not. The only edge comes from this, "The fear of God is the beginning of Wisdom." By being in touch with ultimate reality, I recognize the deviousness of human nature and take seriously the instructions of the Creator. I also know that I will someday stand before Him Who cannot be deceived and all the hidden motivations of the heart will be laid bare.

Rather than being hopeless as that knowledge would imply, I have great joy because the God Who knows me completely, also loves me beyond comprehension and has taken the penalty I deserved. All I have to do is acknowledge my unworthiness and give my life over to Him -- a scary thought except that I know how badly I did and would mess it up. He then guides, empowers and enlightens me. I know I do not always get it right, but the spectacle of the high and mighty mired in foolishness confirms that I am on the correct path.

It can all apply to you as well. All that is needed is something in short supply among the "wealthy," whether that abundance be material or intellectual. The necessary ingredient is humility. But think of it this way, does it make sense to miss the truth for pretending to know the way? In the words of Elisabeth Elliot, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Your faithful gadfly,

Ross

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