

Faith in the Public Square

Lois Mitchell, PhD
Public Witness and Social Concerns
Submitted Nov. 7/03

Resisting the Tempter's Snare

Scripture tells us that Satan is a master of disguise and deception (2 John 1:7) and the father of lies (John 8:44) and that we are embroiled in a spiritual battle (Eph. 6:12). If Satan is orchestrating the public furor over the proposed redefinition of marriage (and I believe he is!) he is certainly enjoying the show. And, I'm afraid that Christians (both individually and corporately) have all too often fallen into his snare and are unwittingly following his script.

Gay rights activists argue that society is ignoring their rights and freedoms. When we argue back that their lifestyle offends us and that we fear for our own rights and our religious freedom, we are setting ourselves up to have the religious freedom argument used against us. The enemy is using this marriage issue to divide denominations and churches. As push comes to shove, the government will need to ask, whose religious freedoms need to be protected: those of the majority (who believe that God cannot endorse same-sex unions) or those of the minority (who have interpreted Scripture differently and are comfortable with invoking God's blessing of same-sex unions)? There are valid religious freedom concerns, but they are not the central issue!

I have just returned from a speaking engagement in Woodstock, N.B. where I had been invited (through Intervarsity) to come to the local high school and make a presentation concerning the marriage issue to several classes of students enrolled in the World Issues course (and other interested students). As I prepared for this presentation I was aware that these same students had recently attended a presentation by Mr. Svend Robinson. In case you don't recognize the name, Svend Robinson is an openly gay MP from British Columbia who has been a powerful and effective advocate for gay rights in Canada and the author of a private member's bill – C250 – a bill to amend the Criminal Code to include sexual orientation in the list of groups requiring special hate crimes protection.

When I arrived at the school several hours before my presentation, I discovered that Mr. Robinson's visit to the school had triggered a tremendous public reaction – even six weeks later, letters to the editor in the local paper were being printed as local area citizens expressed their opinions. Many writers were outraged that Mr. Robinson was permitted to speak in the school at all and some very harshly criticized the teacher of the World Issues class who had invited him to come. The tone and language of many of the letters – most of them from people who objected on the basis of their Christian faith – reflected attitudes of anger, indignation, and fear that students were being exposed to ideas which are contrary to Scripture. As a parent of two teens in public school, I can't help

thinking that it is perhaps naïve to think that our high school students are not exposed every day to thinking and teaching which conflicts with Scripture! And, by the way, the students in the World Issues class submitted their own letter to the editor expressing appreciation for the opportunity to hear Mr. Robinson's presentation and for their teacher's confidence in their ability to think for themselves.

While I'm not sure exactly what Mr. Robinson said in his presentation, I suppose there was an expectation by some that I would come in and present a strong (and therefore) controversial counter argument. I certainly could have done that but I chose not to and I'd like to try to explain why and perhaps use this experience to demonstrate how this particular issue is being used by Satan to further discredit the Christian voice in Canadian society.

I am a passionate pursuer of truth. It is my searching for truth which brought me to Christ (no surprise for those who believe that Christ **is** the way, the truth and the life – John 14:6). And, having come to Christ it is my passion for truth which continues to shape the living out of my faith. The invitation to speak in one of our public high schools is a rare privilege these days and for me, a God-sent opportunity to impact the thinking of a group of teens, not just for an hour, but perhaps for a lifetime and not just on the marriage issue, but on the relevance and credibility of Christ for their world.

As I prepared, it seemed better to challenge the students to pursue truth – to really wrestle with the issues and the conflicting messages they're hearing - than to try to convince them that I know the truth and they should accept it because I say it is so. Truth is incredibly complex. How do teens (or any of us) discern truth? What influences their thinking and our thinking? Bottom line, I believe that if I can set them on the path of truth, they will eventually come to Christ. Therefore, I raised a number of questions and challenged them to find the answers. Questions like:

- Where did "marriage" come from?
- Why has our government recognized marriage?
- Is there anything unique about marriage as compared to other relationships?
- Is marriage good for society? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What about sex? Is there any problem with the "sex as recreation" idea?
- Can people have sex, "just for fun", "no strings attached"?
- Is there a difference between "good sex" and "safe sex"?
- Are people born with a fixed sexual orientation?
- Do children need to know their biological parents?
- Is the current definition of marriage a violation of human rights?
- When, how and why was sexual orientation included in Section 15 of the Charter?
- How many same-sex couples are there in Canada?

- Why have gays and lesbians pushed for a redefinition of marriage?
- Is this a new development? Does it represent the view of the entire gay community?
- Should the churches have a say in who can get married?
- Why do most people get married in a church or by clergy?
- What if we reduce marriage to a civil contract? Is anything lost?
- If marriage is redefined to include same-sex couples, do you think that will lead to more changes?

My hope and my prayer is that as they discuss these questions - and I understand that the two World Issues teachers are intending to use them in class – they will see how complex the issue is, will understand the arguments on all sides of the issue, and will arrive at the conclusion themselves that marriage is a vital institution in our society which needs to be strengthened and affirmed in law and public policy, not so much to make sure gays and lesbians don't get in, but because the deconstruction of marriage will weaken the social fabric in ways that we may not fully understand or anticipate.

And, may we, the Christian community in Canada, resist the tempter's snare and write our own script as we are guided by the Holy Spirit – a script which focuses not on drawing lines and defending our rights, but on the value of marriage to society and the profound truth and mystery in God's plan for man and woman to become one flesh through sexual intimacy in marriage.