Culture Wars

America at (Culture) War

Americans are highly polarized when it comes to issues of morality and social norms. We feel our collective blood pressure rise as we read the daily paper or watch the news on television. We all feel the tension caused by problems like teen pregnancies, abortion, crime, poverty, and political corruption. Factions from across the political spectrum respond with social programs and ideals that, if instituted, they are sure would make America a better place for all to live. However, the problem is that these programs or ideals are often in direct conflict with each other, presupposing very different assumptions about human nature. To highlight these differences, consider the following events.

In the early ’90s the American Civil Liberty Union informed members of the California State Assembly’s Education Committee that they were opposed to a bill the committee was considering. The bill, which called for traditional values in school curricula, was offensive to the ACLU because it would mandate that students be taught that monogamous, heterosexual relations solely within marriage is a traditional American value. The ACLU argued that this would be an “unconstitutional establishment of a religious doctrine in public schools.”{1} They went on to contend that the bill was an obvious violation of the First Amendment.

More recently, a private school in Georgia asked a student to either change his behavior or leave the school. This, in itself, is not a rare event. However, the student wasn’t a discipline problem and he wasn’t failing academically. In fact, he was popular and liked by many on campus. The problem was that he was cross- dressing. He dressed and behaved as a woman and was accepted by many students as a female. When the

student chose to leave the school instead of changing his attire, the school's drama teacher remarked, "I really think that we all lost something precious that night."{2}

To many Americans, the ACLU's action in the first incident is incomprehensible. It seems reasonable, healthy, and obvious for schools to implement a "traditional values" model for sex education. Those on the side of the ACLU find it just as incomprehensible that anyone would see their position as unreasonable or unusual. Some might find the expulsion of the cross-dressing student to be grossly unfair, while most parents would wonder why the school took so long to act.

Regardless of your perspective, everyone agrees that Americans find themselves with deep differences on a number of fundamental issues that govern our daily affairs. Unfortunately, these deep differences have led some Americans to bomb a government building, shoot abortion doctors, or burn down a mountain top ski resort in order to further their cause.

This article will spotlight the culture war we find ourselves in and consider what a biblical response might be. Although few Christians fail to see the conflict in our society, particularly in our schools, they are far from united as to what our response should be. However, from a historical perspective, times of cultural disruption are often a great opportunity for the church, if it is being all that God desires it to be.

Orthodox vs. Progressive

Leaders of all political persuasions have taken note of the culture war that is engulfing our nation. To begin clarifying the issue, we will consider the contribution of two books that have helped to define the conflict for many religious and cultural conservatives: James Hunter's *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* and William Bennett's *The De-*

Valuing of America. Bennett argues that the battle over our culture is being fought between what he calls the liberal elite and the rest of society. The elite are "found among academics and intellectuals, in the literary world, in journals of political opinion, in Hollywood, in the artistic community, in mainline religious institutions, and in some quarters of the media."{3} He feels that they are more powerful than their numbers would normally allow because they are looked upon as trend setters and opinion makers. Differing from traditional elite groups in American history, Bennett argues that these people reject the traditional bourgeois emphasis on work, frugality, sexual restraint, and self-control."{4} As evidence for the existence of this elite, he refers to studies done by Stanley Rothman with Robert and Linda Richter. Their work portrays a media aristocracy that votes as a block for liberal candidates and on issues like abortion, gay rights, and the environment.{5}

Bennett adds that this elite is marked by a wholesale rejection of American ideals, a calling into question of what has been known as the American dream.{6} Evidence is not as significant as ideology for the elite. Their approach is "one of vindication, not investigation."{7} If the middle class and the Republicans are for something, this group will instinctively be against it.

Hunter's approach to defining the warring camps is subtler and, I feel, more accurate. He would argue that there is an elite on both sides of the culture war. On the one hand is what he calls the "orthodox" group. They have a commitment to an external, definable, and transcendent authority. From an evangelical perspective this is the God of the Bible. He is a consistent and unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity. Hunter would also include Jews and others who hold to a definable, unchanging, absolute authority.

Opposing this group are the "progressives." Progressives are

defined by the ideals of modernism, rationalism, and subjectivism. To these people truth is more a process than a constant authority. It is an unfolding reality rather than an unchanging revelation. What is interesting about the progressives is that they often hold on to the religious heritage of the orthodox, but reinterpret its meaning for modern consumption. For instance, to a gay progressive, Christ came not to free us from the penalty of sin, but to free gays from the constraints of society. Although many progressives discard religion altogether, those who claim the Christian tradition have usually adopted a liberation theology, liberating the individual from any obligation other than to love each other in a very vague sense. To love each other seems to mean allowing people do whatever is expedient in their lives.

The real difference between the "orthodox" and the "progressives" is at the faith level. Whether a person calls himself or herself a Christian or not is not nearly as important as what kind of reality they place their faith in. Hunter believes that the culture war is a war of worldviews, and that these worldviews cause us to see the world differently. How then should a Christian, one who places his faith in the sacrificial death of Christ as an atoning payment for his sins, respond to this culture war?

The Angry Christian

Unfortunately, in the eyes of the secular world Christians are often seen as angry, intolerant people. At school board meetings, outside abortion clinics, even at the funeral of a homosexual who was murdered because of his lifestyle, Christians are there to angrily condemn sin and it perpetrators. It is almost as if Christians are surprised by sin and feel that their only response is to point people to the law of God. As a result, many outside the church see Christianity as a religion of law, similar to most other world

religions. This is a tragedy.

Although understandable, I don't believe that we are called as Christians to respond to the culture war in anger, especially anger directed at people. Although the wrath of God is evident in both the Old and New Testaments, condemnation of human anger is also present in each. Near the very beginning of human culture, God warns Cain about his anger and downcast face. Instead of seeking to do what was right, Cain was angry with God and his situation (Gen. 4:6-7). The wisdom literature of Proverbs teaches us, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger," and "A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated" (Prov. 14:17, 15:1).

In the New Testament, Paul condemns "hatred" and "fits of rage" immediately before listing the spiritual fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. James 1:19-20 is fairly straightforward in arguing that, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." Jesus set an extraordinarily high standard against anger and hatred in His Sermon on the Mount. He taught, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matt. 5:21-22). Jesus is speaking to the root cause of much evil in any society: an angry, unforgiving heart.

Some may respond that righteous indignation, or anger against sin is merely emulating Christ. After all, Jesus cleared the Temple with a whip and violently overturned the moneylender's tables. Are we not allowed the same righteous indignation? I think not, especially if we take seriously God's admonition to let Him be in charge of judgment and vengeance (Rom. 12:19). In fact, Paul tells us to feed our enemy if he is hungry, give

him drink if he is thirsty, and to overcome evil by doing good (Rom. 12:20-21). The difference between Jesus' righteous indignation and our anger is that Jesus, being God, has the right to judge, and being perfectly righteous His judgment is perfect. He knows the hearts of men and has no bias other than holiness itself. On the other hand, we are often most angry when our personal comfort is disturbed. To the watching world, Christians become the most interested in politics when their personal wealth or comfort is at stake.

I don't believe that God is calling His people to anger in America. We bring a message of grace to the lost, not a message of law.

Apathy

Many Christians have been active in the culture war since the early '80s. With the rise of conservative politics and the family values movement, Christians joined the Republican party in droves and joined numerous organizations in order to help fight against the moral decline of the nation. Given the popularity of the current Democratic President and what appears, in many ways, to be a rejection of the conservative moral agenda, it is tempting for many to simply retreat from activism all together.

Some Christians never did get engaged in a counter-cultural sense. In fact, an early evangelical leader in culture war activity, Francis Schaeffer, warned that most Christians were more concerned with personal peace and affluence than about having an impact in their society.{8} He was concerned that as the Christian- dominated consensus weakened, these two values would grow in their place. The picture of society we are left with is one in which people's lives are consumed by things, buying two SUV's and a nice big house in the suburbs, with a nice tall fence, color TV (a big color TV), and remote. These people do not want to know about the suffering in our urban ghettos or about the plight of Christians in other countries.

They want their lives to be unimpeded by the turmoil experienced by less affluent people.

Is it wrong to have a nice house and cars? No, it isn't. But neither is it the ultimate purpose to which our Lord has called us. Gathering nice things should not be motivating our daily activities. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandments were, He responded that we are to first, love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37), and second, love our neighbor as ourselves. For Christians, success in this life should be measured against these two goals. The rest of revelation, both the written Word and the life of Christ, gives us a picture of what this means in both the general culture and within the church. Christ gave us the Great Commission, to go into all nations making disciples and teaching what He taught (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul talks about us being living sacrifices and the renewing of our minds so that we will know the will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

To be indifferent about sin is to not love God; this form of apathy is incompatible with true Christian faith. However, to be indifferent about suffering in the world is equally incompatible with our faith. To ignore oppression and hatred reveals a lack of love for our neighbors. Too often Christians only seem to get excited when their rights, whether property or religious, are threatened. This makes a mockery of our Lord's words when He said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). In Romans 12 Paul talks about blessing those who persecute you, and if it is possible, to be at peace with everyone around you.

Hebrews 12 tells us to throw off everything that entangles us, everything that keeps us from running the race marked out for us by Jesus. We are to fix our eyes on Him, who endured the cross because its joyous result would be a redeemed people of God.

Ambassadors For Christ

When thinking about how to respond to the culture war in America, or in any culture, we must ask ourselves, What is it that we are trying to accomplish? In the language of real war, What are our tactical and strategic goals? Some might respond that we are here to fight sin, to rid our society of the evils of abortion, homosexuality, adultery, drug abuse, political corruption, etc. There are Christians who claim that our primary cultural objective is to reinstate the law of Moses by taking control of the government and using its legal authority to impose a moral society on the population. However, this does not appear to be the plan revealed to us in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians chapter five, Paul details the role we are to play in America or in any country we might live in. We are to be Christ's ambassadors, and our message is one of reconciliation with God. There are many religions pushing a message of law; Islam, Judaism, and most Eastern religions all focus on the works people must do in order to please God or the gods. They focus on how humanity must reform itself to gain God's favor. Christianity's message is grace, and as Christ's ambassadors we proclaim that God has reconciled us to Himself in Christ by making "Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." God is making the righteousness of Christ available to sinners; salvation is the crediting of Christs righteousness to our personal account, thus satisfying the judgment of a holy God against our personal sins.

What about social activism, what about politics? Do we just share the gospel and ignore the problems facing our nation? No, we are to be salt and light in a decaying world. However, our trust is not in politics, which can only change a nations laws and to a lesser degree its peoples behavior. Even if abortion ended tomorrow, if every homosexual became

heterosexual, and if drugs and pornography were things of the past, people without Christ would still be lost in their sins.

The role of an ambassador is a complex one. He or she must be intimately familiar with the nature of their sovereign's kingdom. Christians must seek to know God and His message in a way that can be communicated to the culture they live in. Unfortunately, Christians often know the message, but have a difficult time communicating it in a way that the surrounding culture understands, and in a way that answers the questions being asked by that society. Stating the gospel accurately and in a meaningful manner is central to being an effective ambassador for Christ.

If we are to respond to the culture war by being ambassadors for Christ, then the vitality of the church becomes far more important than controlling the White House or Congress. Understanding how to communicate the gospel of Christ becomes infinitely more valuable than having the most potent political strategy. Being faithful to Christ in this way builds Gods kingdom on earth and results in common grace as more and more believers participate in every aspect of our culture.

Notes

1. James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 310.

2. *Dallas Morning News,* 30 October 1998, 7A.

3. William J. Bennett, *The De-Valuing of America* (Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994).

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Bennett, 12.

7. Ibid.

8. Francis A. Schaeffer, *How then Shall We Live* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976), 205.

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The Teen Sexual Revolution – Abstinence Programs Are The Only Biblical Response

Kerby Anderson considers the real problems created by the new American attitude extolling the virtues of teen sexual activity. He examines the effectiveness of various programs designed to stem the tide of teen sexual activity. He concludes the only reasonable approach is teaching the reasons for and benefits of abstinence prior to marriage.

One of the low points in television history occurred September 25, 1991. The program was "Doogie Howser, M.D." This half-hour TV show, aimed at preteen and teenage kids, focused on the trials and tribulations of an 18-year-old child prodigy who graduated from medical school and was in the midst of medical practice. Most programs dealt with the problems of being a kid in an adult's profession. But on September 25 the "problem" Doogie Howser confronted was the fact that he was still a virgin.

Advance publicity drove the audience numbers to unanticipated levels. Millions of parents, teenagers, and pajama-clad kids sat down in front of their televisions to watch Doogie Howser and his girlfriend Wanda deal with his "problem." Twenty

minutes into the program, they completed the act. Television ratings went through the roof. Parents and advertisers should have as well.

What is wrong with this picture? Each day approximately 7700 teenagers relinquish their virginity. In the process, many will become pregnant and many more will contract a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Already 1 in 4 Americans have an STD, and this percentage is increasing each year. Weren't the producers of "Doogie Howser, M.D." aware that teenage pregnancy and STDs are exploding in the population? Didn't they stop and think of the consequences of portraying virginity as a "problem" to be rectified? Why weren't parents and advertisers concerned about the message this program was sending?

Perhaps the answer is the trite, age-old refrain "everybody's doing it." Every television network and nearly every TV program deals with sensuality. Sooner or later the values of every other program were bound to show up on a TV program aimed at preteens and teenagers. In many ways the media is merely reflecting a culture that was transformed by a sexual revolution of values. Sexually liberal elites have hijacked our culture by seizing control of two major arenas. The first is the entertainment media (television, movies, rock music, MTV). The second is the area of sex education (sex education classes and school- based clinics). These two forces have transformed the social landscape of America and made promiscuity a virtue and virginity a "problem" to be solved.

The Teenage Sexuality Crisis

We face a teenage sexuality crisis in America. Consider these alarming statistics of children having children. A New York Times article reported: "Some studies indicate three-fourths of all girls have had sex during their teenage years and 15 percent have had four or more partners." A Lou Harris poll commissioned by Planned Parenthood discovered that 46 percent

of 16-year-olds and 57 percent of 17-year-olds have had sexual intercourse.

Former Secretary of Education William Bennett in speaking to the National School Board Association warned that “The statistics by which we measure how our children how our boys and girls are treating one another sexually are little short of staggering.” He found that more than one-half of America’s young people have had sexual intercourse by the time they are seventeen. He also found that more than one million teenage girls in the U.S. become pregnant each year. Of those who give birth, nearly half are not yet eighteen.

“These numbers,” William Bennett concluded, “are an irrefutable indictment of sex education’s effectiveness in reducing teenage sexual activity and pregnancies.” Moreover, these numbers are not skewed by impoverished, inner city youths from broken homes. One New York polling firm posed questions to 1300 students in 16 high schools in suburban areas in order to get a reading of “mainstream” adolescent attitudes. They discovered:

- *57% lost virginity in high school*
- *79% lost virginity by the end of college*
- *16.9 average age for sex*
- *33% of high school students had sex once a month to once a week*
- *52% of college students had sex once a month to once a week.*

Kids are trying sex at an earlier age than ever before. More than a third of 15-year-old boys have had sexual intercourse as have 27 percent of the 15-year-old girls. Among sexually active teenage girls, 61 percent have had multiple partners. The reasons for such early sexual experimentation are many.

Biology is one reason. Teenagers are maturing faster sexually due to better health and nutrition. Since the turn of the century, for example, the onset of menstruation in girls has dropped three months each decade. Consequently, urges that used to arise in the mid-teens now explode in the early teens. Meanwhile the typical age of first marriage has risen more than four years since the 1950s.

A sex-saturated society is another reason. Sex is used to sell everything from cars to toothpaste. Sexual innuendos clutter most every TV program and movie. And explicit nudity and sensuality that used to be reserved for R-rated movies has found it way into the home through broadcast and cable television. Media researchers calculate that teenagers see approximately five hours of TV a day. This means that they see each year nearly 14,000 sexual encounters on television alone.

Lack of parental supervision and direction is a third reason. Working parents and reductions in after-school programs have left teenagers with less supervision and a looser after-school life. In the inner city, the scarcity of jobs and parents coupled with a cynical view of the future invites teenage promiscuity and its inevitable consequences. Adolescent boys in the suburbs trying to prove their masculinity, herd into groups like the infamous score- keeping Spur Posse gang in California.

Even when teenagers want to sit out the sexual revolution, they often get little help from parents who may be too embarrassed or intimidated to talk to their children. Parents, in fact, often lag behind their kids in sexual information. At one sex-education workshop held by Girls Inc. (formerly Girls Club of America), nearly half of the mothers had never seen a condom. Other mothers did not want to talk about sex because they were molested as children and were fearful of talking about sex with their daughters.

Teenagers are also getting mixed messages. In any given week,

they are likely to hear contradictory messages. “No sex until you’re married.” “No sex unless you’re older.” “No sex unless you’re protected.” “No sex unless you’re in love.” No wonder adolescents are confused.

The Report Card on Sex Education

For more than thirty years proponents of comprehensive sex education have told us that giving sexual information to young children and adolescents will reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. In that effort nearly $3 billion has been spent on federal Title X family planning services, yet teenage pregnancies and abortions rise.

Perhaps one of the most devastating popular critiques of comprehensive sex education came from Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. The journalist who said that Dan Quayle was right also was willing to say that sex education was wrong. Her article in the October 1994 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* entitled “The Failure of Sex Education” demonstrated that sex education neither reduced pregnancy nor slowed the spread of STDs.

Comprehensive sex education is mandated in at least 17 states, so Whitehead chose one state and focused her analysis on the sex education experiment in New Jersey. Like other curricula the New Jersey sex education program rests on certain questionable assumptions.

The first tenet is that children are “sexual from birth.” Sex educators reject the classic notion of a latency period until approximately age twelve. They argue that you are “being sexual when you throw your arms around your grandpa and give him a hug.”

Second, sex educators hold that children are sexually miseducated. Parents, in their view, have simply not done their job, so we need “professionals” to do it right. Parents try to protect their children, fail to affirm their sexuality,

and even discuss sexuality in a context of moralizing. The media, they say, is also guilty of providing sexual misinformation.

Third, if miseducation is the problem, then sex education in the schools is the solution. Parents are failing miserably at the task, so "it is time to turn the job over to the schools. Schools occupy a safe middle ground between Mom and MTV."

Learning About Family Life is the curriculum used in New Jersey. While it discusses such things as sexual desire, AIDS, divorce, condoms, and masturbation, it nearly ignores such issues as abstinence, marriage, self-control, and virginity. One technique promoted to prevent pregnancy and STDs is noncoital sex, or what some sex educators call outercourse. Yet there is good evidence to suggest that teaching teenagers to explore their sexuality through noncoital techniques will lead to coitus. Ultimately, outercourse will lead to intercourse.

Whitehead concludes that comprehensive sex education has been a failure. For example, the percent of teenage births to unwed mothers was 67 percent in 1980 and rose to 84 percent in 1991. In the place of this failed curriculum, Whitehead describes a better program. She found that "sex education works best when it combines clear messages about behavior with strong moral and logistical support for the behavior sought." One example she cites is the *Postponing Sexual Involvement* program at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, which offers more than a "Just Say No" message. It reinforces the message by having adolescents practice the desired behavior and enlists the aid of older teenagers to teach younger teenagers how to resist sexual advances. Whitehead also found that "religiously observant teens" are less likely to experiment sexually, thus providing an opportunity for church-related programs to stem the tide of teenage pregnancy. The results of Whitehead's research are clear: abstinence is still the best form of sex education.

Is “Safe Sex” Really Safe?

At the 1987 World Congress of Sexologists, Theresa Crenshaw asked the audience, “If you had the available partner of your dreams and knew that person carried HIV, how many of you would have sex depending on a condom for your protection?” When they were asked for a show of hands, none of the 800 members of the audience indicated that they would trust the condoms. If condoms do not eliminate the fear of HIV-infection for sexologists and sex educators, why do we encourage the children of America to play STD Russian Roulette?

Are condoms a safe and effective way to reduce pregnancy and STDs? To listen to sex educators you would think so. Every day sex education classes throughout this country promote condoms as a means of safe sex or at least safer sex. But the research on condoms provides no such guarantee.

For example, Texas researcher Susan Weller writing in the 1993 issue of *Social Science Medicine*, evaluated all research published prior to July 1990 on condom effectiveness. She reported that condoms are only 87 percent effective in preventing pregnancy and 69 percent effective in reducing the risk of HIV infection. This translates into a 31 failure rate in preventing AIDS transmission. And according to a study in the 1992 Family Planning Perspectives, 15 percent of married couples who use condoms for birth control end up with an unplanned pregnancy within the first year.

So why has condom distribution become the centerpiece of the U.S. AIDS policy and the most frequently promoted aspect of comprehensive sex education? For many years, the answer to that question was an a priori commitment to condoms and a safe sex message over an abstinence message. But in recent years, sex educators and public health officials have been pointing to one study which appeared to vindicate the condom policy.

The study was presented at the Ninth International Conference

on AIDS held in Berlin on June 9, 1993. The study involved 304 couples with one partner who was HIV positive. Of the 123 couples who used condoms with each act of sexual intercourse, not a single negative HIV partner became positive. So proponents of condom distribution thought they had scientific vindication for their views.

Unfortunately that is not the whole story. Condoms do appear to be effective in stopping the spread of AIDS when used "correctly and consistently." Most individuals, however, do not use them "correctly and consistently." What happens to them? Well, it turns out that part of the study received much less attention. Of 122 couples who could not be taught to use condoms properly, 12 became HIV positive in both partners. Undoubtably over time, even more partners would contract AIDS.

How well does this study apply to the general population? I would argue the couples in the study group were quite dissimilar from the general population. For example, they knew the HIV status of their spouse and therefore had a vested interest in protecting themselves. They were responsible partners and in a committed monogamous relationship. In essence, their actions and attitudes differ dramatically from teenagers and single adults who do not know the HIV status of their partners, are often reckless, and have multiple sexual partners.

Contrary to popular belief, condoms are not as reliable as public health pronouncements might lead you to think. Abstinence is still the only safe sex.

Only Abstinence-Only Programs Really Work

Less than a decade ago, an abstinence-only program was rare in the public schools. Today directive abstinence programs can be found in many school districts while battles are fought in other school districts for their inclusion or removal. While proponents of abstinence programs run for school board or

influence existing school board members, groups like Planned Parenthood bring lawsuits against districts that use abstinence-based curricula arguing that they are inaccurate or incomplete. At least a dozen abstinence- based curricula are on the market, with the largest being *Sex Respect* (Bradley, Illinois) and *Teen-Aid* (Spokane, Washington).

The emergence of abstinence-only programs as an alternative to comprehensive sex education programs was due to both popularity and politics. Parents concerned about the ineffectiveness of the safe sex message eagerly embraced the message of abstinence. And political funding helped spread the message and legitimize its educational value. The Adolescent Family Life Act enacted in 1981 by the Reagan Administration created Title XX and set aside $2 million a year for the development and implementation of abstinence-based programs. Although the Clinton Administration later cut funding for abstinence programs, the earlier funding in the 1980s helped groups like Sex Respect and Teen-Aid launch abstinence programs in the schools.

Parents and children have embraced the abstinence message in significant numbers. One national poll by the University of Chicago found that 68 percent of adults surveyed said premarital sex among teenagers is “always wrong.” A 1994 poll for USA Weekend asked more than 1200 teens and adults what they thought of “several high profile athletes [who] are saying in public that they have abstained from sex before marriage and are telling teens to do the same.” Seventy-two percent of the teens and 78 percent of the adults said they agree with the pro-abstinence message.

Their enthusiasm for abstinence-only education is well founded. Even though the abstinence message has been criticized by some as naive or inadequate, there are good reasons to promote abstinence in schools and society.

1. Teenagers want to learn about abstinence. Contrary to the

often repeated teenage claim, not “everyone’s doing it.” A 1992 study by the Centers for Disease Control found that 43 percent of teenagers (age 14 to 17) had engaged in sexual intercourse at least once. Put another way, the latest surveys suggest that a majority of teenagers are not doing it.

2. Abstinence prevents pregnancy. Proponents of abstinence-only programs argue that it will significantly lower the teenage pregnancy rate and cited lots of anecdotes and statistics to make their case. For example, the San Marcos Junior High in San Marcos, California, adopted an abstinence-only program developed by Teen- Aid. The curriculum dropped the school’s pregnancy rate from 147 to 20 within a two-year period. An abstinence-only program for girls in Washington, D.C., has seen only one of 400 girls become pregnant.

3. Abstinence prevents sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). After more than three decades, the sexual revolution has taken lots of prisoners. Before 1960 there were only two STDs that doctors were concerned about: syphilis and gonorrhea. Today, there are more than 20 significant STDs ranging from the relatively harmless to the fatal. Twelve million Americans are newly infected each year, and 63 percent of these new infections are in people less than 25 years old. Eighty percent of those infected with an STD have absolutely no symptoms.

The conclusion is simple: abstinence is the only truly safe sex.

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