

Which One Is the Wife?

Well, talk about a stunned silence.

Our family was debating the Egan and Nesbit case currently before the Supreme Court of Canada, in which two homosexual men who are reported to have lived "pretty much as a married couple," are claiming a right to spousal status and benefits.

Suddenly, in one of those defining moments that serves to focus a wandering argument, so that the reality warp that has everyone in its grip falls away before the clear light of day, my twelve year-old son asked:

"Which one is the Wife?"

That question will always ring in my ears because the obvious answer is - neither; for neither can ever be. And neither can we argue "it's up to them," as in: you be the wife this week, me the next. For any society that abandons its ancient right to define, control, and most of all to discriminate over the terms of marriage, to the predilections of any two or more human beings that happen to share the rent, has abandoned marriage altogether.

Then it struck me that if we look beyond this particular case to the actual process at work in the court, we can see that Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in this and other cases, is being used as a battering ram to break down civil society. I wonder if the judges will see this process before it's too late?

For it seems there are only three ways we get controlled. Above us is the involuntary control of the State (as all too visible in the income tax). In the middle is the social control of millions of voluntary groups that comprise civil society (we voluntarily submit to the authority of marriage, the Boy Scouts, our corporation, and so on). And finally, at the bottom, there are millions of autonomous individuals exercising self-control (most of the time).

I contend that the egalitarian State has the effect, (sometimes, the ambition) of breaking down the voluntary authority of civil society through its evangelical eagerness to equalize everyone under its own coercive influence. One way it does this (and in this respect, the courts become an arm of the state) is through Charter-style attacks on our ancient social right to discriminate between those who opt into social groups, and those who do not (who nevertheless are left alone with all their normal individual rights). What we end up with is an unintentional ideological war between the State and society, the end consequence of which (the end purpose, in socialist states) is to weaken society and strengthen the State.

For all social groups rely on a kind of solemn right of passage, the markers of which are sacrifice, subordination, commitment - and that nasty old thing called privilege.

Sacrifice refers to the requirement that individuals aspiring to join a social group must voluntarily agree to place the common will of the group above personal needs. The

motto of common organizations like Rotary International, for example, is "Service Above Self."

Subordination refers to the requirement that all members must submit to the authority and discipline of the group. For infidelity, members get expelled, Boy Scouts get demoted, spouses get divorced.

Commitment is the process whereby the member who gets this far is asked formally to make a vow, or a public verbal or written commitment, to shared ideals. That's the bonding.

Privilege is the last stage whereby society (sometimes backed by the law, as in family law) approves the bestowal of specific benefits and protections on each qualified member. That means money. Status. Approval.

All of civil society, we might say, is thus really a vast organism that hovers over the great undifferentiated mass of autonomous individuals, seeking not only to *select*, but to *direct*; to lure them into its own far more challenging and difficult social life. This is a process inherently preferential, and intentionally exclusionary, and the modern liberal project is to destroy it.

So we try in vain to imagine a world in which little boys - or girls - demand the right to wear Boy Scout uniforms without qualifying for them; where homosexuals demand the legal, tax, and even commercial advantages and privileges of married couples, without submitting to the difficult procreative sexual order of society (on which even their existence depends); where non-members claim the rights and benefits of membership in groups for which they have not qualified; where the rights of private and commercial property are brought down, and the natural propensity of all human beings to create meaningful positive social distinctions and privileges is driven underground.

When there is no meaningful society left, when it is sufficiently weakened, slack, and torpid, when there is intolerable crime in the streets and the schools, when drugs and disease mount their eager claims, when every window in every home is barred, when political and social cynicism reign supreme, there will be only one authority to consider: the all-controlling State, cultivating allegiance, even grateful admiration and obedience from its millions of autonomous and utterly dependent children, even as it crumbles. We have brought this upon ourselves in the name of rights and freedoms.