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Sex and the Single-Sex Dorm

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NCR Today

In today's *Wall Street Journal*, the president of The Catholic University of America announced that the university will eliminate all co-ed dorms and return to single-sex dorms in an attempt to curb binge drinking and "hooking up."

Already, conservative bloggers, traditionalist Catholics and nervous parents are applauding the move. I suspect that was John Garvey's true motivation.

For those shocked that a Catholic university, especially one like CUA, which has official ties to the Vatican, even has co-ed dorms, worry not. As the university's housing services' Web page explains, all student residence halls are already single-sex by floor, wing or building.

Given the image of debauchery going on in those mildly co-ed dorms that Garvey alludes to in his op-ed piece, I was surprised to see CUA ranked #7 [Correction: The ranking is alphabetical. But CUA did make the list of 32 schools.] on the "Catholic Identity College List 2010" published by the *National Catholic Register*.

Among the 10 criteria for the "Catholic identity" list is -- you guessed it -- "no coed dorms." (You didn't think it was going to include the teaching of Catholic social teaching, did you?) The CUA entry says "no co-ed dorms" with an asterisk, which leads to this comment: "We have both single-sex residence halls as well as residence halls with floors segregated by gender."

It seems this "return" to single-sex dorms isn't as big of a change as Garvey makes it out to be.

After spending much of the first three paragraphs of the op-ed piece quoting Aristotle on virtue, Garvey, a father of five, cites a number of stats that show students in coed dorms drink and hook up more than those

who live in single-sex dorms. (No stats on those who live off campus.) Of course, as any student taking an Intro to Stats class at CUA could tell the president, those statistics only show correlation, though, not causation.

I was also offended by Garvey's assertion that he thought 'young women would have a civilizing influence on young men.' I guess he won't be mistaken for a feminist.

Binge drinking and casual sex truly are problems on college campuses. But unless Garvey plans to return the entire university to 1950, I doubt this move will do much to curb either harmful practice. In fact, as others have pointed out, some of the worst binge drinking happens in single-sex men's dorms, not to mention in single-sex sorority and fraternity houses.

But the 'change' will surely position CUA as a place Catholic parents can feel 'safe' sending their adult children. A brilliant PR move.

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